THE WABASH CENTER
JOURNAL ON TEACHING

PIVOT

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JOURNAL DESCRIPTION

The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching (JoT) is a biannual multimodal publication focused on the scholarship of teaching in the fields of religious and theological studies, in both undergraduate and graduate educational contexts. Each issue is theme-driven and includes various forms of media—such as articles, poetry, visual art, videos of performing art, and music—in service to critical reflection on teaching.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

- **Nancy Lynne Westfield**
  The Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion

The scholarship of theology and religion occurs in context. With this in mind, we are teaching in a moment of unfamiliarity and for some schools, crisis. This new year of 2022 finds us in the midst of a global viral pandemic which has extended from months into years—with, given viral variants, uncertain forecasts for a conclusion. The critical need for the work of the Black Lives Matter movement is fueled by new incidents of racial injustice and police abuse. Shifting weather patterns have caught entire towns off-guard, unprepared, and in many instances resulted in devastation. Unrest about US governmental structures and the struggles of democracy are the headlines of most newscasts. These references only name a scant few of the national and international events upon which our attention, resources, and emotional health are focused. With each passing school term, higher education and theological education is challenged to react, engage, and respond in this unfamiliar context. As a society, and as the academy, we are facing challenges for which we have no map, no plan, no proposal.

Pivot

(1) to modify (i.e. academic journals, knowledge production, etc.) while retaining some continuity with its previous version as resistance to the status quo; (2) to disrupt arcane patterns of scholarly writing utilizing creative prose, pictures, music, assorted artforms; (3) the title of this JoT issue.

NL Westfield

In times of uncertainty, it is difficult to pivot, to rethink, and to be creative in our teaching and in our scholarship, as individuals and as institutions. The impulse for many during moments of distress is to hunker down, rely upon the traditional, and depend upon the status quo. Perhaps, rather than depending upon the outmoded, we begin to design the new. The Wabash Center, in the spirit of leadership toward change and innovation, has begun to revamp the Journal on Teaching.

Since its inception twenty-six years ago until now—the mission of the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion is to enhance and strengthen education in theology and religion in theological schools, colleges, and universities in the United States and Canada. With this mission in mind, it feels like there could be no better time than now to reboot our journal toward renewed measures of scholarship and an expanded notion of the scholarly voice.

The Wabash Center's Journal on Teaching moved to an open access platform a few years ago. Now, as a digital scholarly journal, we are diversifying the kinds of writing we are including in the journal. We believe that in this 2022 context, the scholarly contributions of thinkers in religion and theology are much needed in and beyond the academy. To this end, we have reconceived our journal's description:

The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching (JoT) is a multimodal publication focused on the scholarship of teaching in the fields of religious and theological studies, in both undergraduate and graduate educational contexts. Each issue is theme-driven and includes various forms of media—such as articles, poetry, visual art, videos of performing art, and music—in service to critical reflection on teaching.

Additionally, in expanding the potential contributions and access points of the scholarly writing of religion and theology, JoT will model a new peer review process. We are experimenting with creating a more collaborative, generative, and supportive process for writers and colleagues as our peer review. This new process began with a writing colloquy held from January 9 to 12, 2022. A full description of our emerging process can be found on our website.

Given the ongoing threat of the viral pandemic, the heightening racial unrest, and the overall need to rethink outmoded models of higher education, the Wabash Center continues to learn how best to serve our constituency. Feedback from participants has encouraged us to create and disseminate resources mindful of learner-centered teaching that emphasize connecting the classroom with the wider world and assist teachers in being more imaginative and ingenuous in teaching. As an institution which is responsive to the needs of our participants, the Center is endeavoring to meet these requests, needs, and challenges. It is our intent that the Journal on Teaching becomes a resource that inspires and informs for such a time as this. This issue, entitled Pivot, is the beginning of our turn toward a journal that encourages scholarship to become more imaginative, creative, and relevant.

ASSOCIATE EDITOR'S NOTE

- **Annie Lockhart-Gilroy**
  Phillips Theological Seminary

As a girl in dance and modelling, I loved a stylish pivot. The simple pivot turn is a basic move, but it does require some technique. You hold yourself upright and turn planted on the balls of your feet in a way that provides agility and support. You don't move your feet forward; they should stay in the same place. To keep from being disoriented, it is helpful to spot—eyes focused on a particular thing in the room until the last moment when the head moves and completes the turn. It is a simple, elegant turn—unless you are little Annie, trying to be bold. What I liked was not the pivot itself but the pose I could strike at the end of it—putting my hands on my hips and giving a sassy look. Instead of focusing on the complete simple process, I focused only on the end. I turned too fast. I did too many things. I twirled around like a Tasmanian devil in heels with hands flailing in the air, ending in a pose a little off-balance. It wasn't pretty. But my instructor taught me how to slow down. First, the simple pivot. Then, move forward with style.

This issue of the Wabash Center Journal on Teaching shows the process of the simple pivot. For the past year a group of people have imagined together what this journal could be. With so many journals on teaching in publication, what niche could this one fill? We revamped not only the final look, but the process of writing towards publication. However, before we come out with an issue that strikes a pose at the end, we decided to first release a simple pivot.

Planting Our Feet

In order to be agile and supported, we focused on ways that the Wabash Center has always been dedicated to scholarly writing in different forms. Some of the best examples are in the Wabash Center Blogs. Bloggers use a variety of writing styles to present great and impactful ideas that enhance the scholarship of teaching. In this issue, we are republishing blog posts that focus on creativity, the use of the arts in the classroom, social justice, and making changes. We are calling these "writing shorts." These writings are often not considered "scholarly writing." But since part of our goal is to push the boundaries of that term, we have to ask, "Why not?" These writings cause us to pause and think differently about our preconceptions and practice and remind us that scholarship comes in many different forms.

Spotting

Supporting teachers and scholars of teaching has always been the focal spot of the Wabash Center even as we turn and move in different directions. One of the ways the Center does this is through grants. This issue presents three ruminations that stem from grant work. Michelle Watkins reflects on her individual journey to implement a race- and gender-conscious trauma-informed pedagogy for undergraduate students from marginal and minoritized groups in a course on Black and Womanist theologies. Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand, Beverley McGuire, and Hussein Rashid share insights from a learning community that met for two years to discuss and study how learning is constructed in theory and in teaching. Tim Van Meter examines working with his institution to explore multiple avenues for more closely weaving our ecological commitments and the work of anti-racism. These reflections show both individual and communal work towards teaching topics that affect our students, institutions, and larger society. They show the importance of interrogating a topic and spending time reflecting in community about the best way to move forward.

Turning and Heading in a New Direction

Our essays showcase four different types of writing that represent the writing diversity this journal is turning towards. Jack Seymour reflects on the field of Christian religious education and reports the results of a study he conducted on course syllabi from introductory courses. His work sheds light on what is at the heart of Christian religious education. Sandie Gravett, Laura Ammon, Ann Burlein, Amanda Beckenstein Mbuvi, and Joseph Witt write about generating a public-facing pedagogy for the undergraduate classroom, reimagining the boundaries between the university and the public. Sophfronia Scott's piece about writing workshops offers a glimpse into our writing colloquies. We end the journal with a multimodal piece by Ralph Basui Watkins and Joshua Rashaad McFadden. Watkins and McFadden incorporates the visual art of photography and the power that capturing images can have to change the classroom and the world.

The journal is living into the Wabash Center's legacy of community and hospitality, beginning with the writing process. We seek ways for writers to write not in isolation but in community, supporting and challenging each other to produce the best work they can. We aim to have several multimodal pieces in each issue. We will weave in various types of artistic expressions, creative forms of writing, and multifarious articles that has been created in community through a collaborative peer-review process. The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching is changing in many ways, but as we look at the work in this issue, we see pieces that represent the different aspects of the Wabash Center and realize that we are living more deeply into our Wabash identity, so that we can move forward in style.

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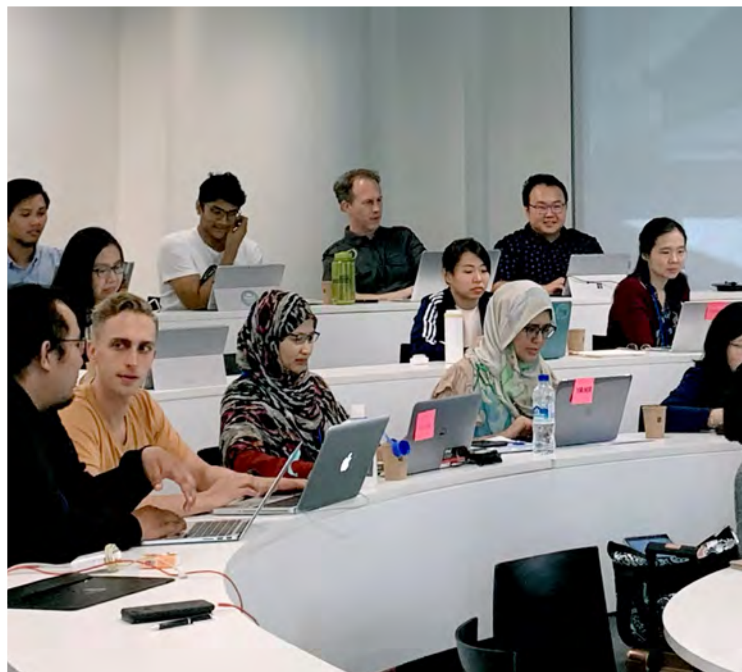

Teaching on the Pivot

(a five-part series of writing shorts)

Christine J. Hong
Columbia Theological Seminary

Part 1 – Art is Everywhere

I've always loved art. Some of my earliest memories are of coloring on the walls, much to my mother's dismay. Today, I enjoy sketching and painting, but as a disclaimer, I'm not a skilled artist by any means. I am someone who enjoys creating art and has grown to appreciate the way the arts have shaped my life and personhood. In my adolescence, I was hungry for art. It didn't matter that I wasn't the best at it, just that somehow it filled me up in a way nothing else did. In my search for art, I took every available fine arts class offered at school. I took lessons on Korean calligraphy and painting at my Korean immigrant church on the weekends, joined all the choirs, and tried out for school and community theater. I fell in love with the synergy between the physicality and spirituality of what art did in and through me. The more I learned and engaged in the practice of art, the more art became a necessary spiritual practice.

As a young person who was still trying to understand religion, I somehow sensed that the divine met me in those nebulous and vibrant spaces where art was made. There was nothing as exciting as a blank sheet of paper and that first mark of graphite pencil on its surface. What came after—whatever image or pattern appeared on the page—took on a life of its own, almost of its own accord--sacred about making, giving something shape and meaning. All of us did this so naturally as children. Do you remember? When was the last time you picked up a pencil, crayon, paint, or markers, for fun? When was the last time you built something just to try it? As I grew into adulthood, I continued to love art, but I had a narrower view of it. I thought there was a place and time for art, that I had to carve out intentional space for art to happen.

After I had children, I lost that sense of order and time. Day and night blurred as did my sleeping and waking hours. There was no such thing as carving out space for anything on my to-do list, let alone art. The way I understood and recognized art began to expand to include the practice of noticing. I began to notice the artistic quality of things created and growing around me. It started when I began to see the world through my children's eyes. As their grownup, I had a lot to relearn from them. Do you also find it sad that we so easily forget the perspective of noticing and marveling as we grow into adulthood? As adults, we need to work hard to relearn and regain the perspective that came so naturally in childhood. For instance, my children gasp when they see insects, not out of fear, but out of interest and wonder. I still only scream.

During my journey to adulthood, I had learned appreciation for the fine arts, but I had forgotten to stop and notice the beauty and artistry of everything around me. Art didn't have a designated place and time. Life is art. Art is life. During the first year of the pandemic, when both my children were learning virtually at home, so was I. My children shared with me their love of dandelions, ant hills, finding cicada exoskeletons in the summer, and marveling at the chaos of a thunderstorm from the safety of our porch. For them, there was no mundane. There was no simple. It was all gloriously complex and wonderous. How marvelous that those branches were just right for climbing! How curious that there are so many shades of red, orange, and yellow in tomatoes. How weird that cats have whiskers on the backs of their legs. (They do! Check it out.) I keep learning from them that the artistic exists in everything, in both the order and the mess. I keep learning that it is a spiritual practice to relearn appreciation for the miracle of the everyday. It connects me to the divine and back to myself, back to the earth, and back to the people with whom I am in community.

Part 2 – Art as the Pivot Art in the Classroom

During the past year and a half of the pandemic, the uprisings for racial justice, the continued fight for LGBTQIATS justice, the struggle for the rights of immigrants, and the global impact of climate change, I discovered an urgency in myself to create and to grow things as a way to resist and refuse the

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> The academy is a colonial entity. It is invested in colonizing us, thoroughly and into generations; colonization of thought processes and embodiments, the way we collect knowledge, our communal epistemologies, and the way we assess learning."

death dealing all around us. The realization of so many lives lost, generations cut off, and futures extinguished weighed heavier each day. As a coping mechanism, I feverishly planted things in my garden, from herbs to vegetables, and grew green things in my home. I willed each and every plant to thrive and flourish, even as I felt rage and, at times, despair about the state of the world. I wondered if others felt the same. If colleagues and students felt weary, depleted by the constant weight of white supremacy pressing down on every inch of our lives. I started asking myself if what I was teaching even mattered anymore. Did what I was assigning students to read and write speak back to the now? Did the topics we were discussing speak truth and do the work of witnessing the rage and anguish of the past and present? Did my lectures also speak into the creation and necessary intentionality of embodied joy as an act of refusing oppression in our lives? Did the classes I designed speak into the flourishing futures we were trying to co-create?

Here's the pivot. Once our institution was entirely online and I realized that as educators, we had collectively reached a level of exhaustion and depletion that would continue into the future, I craved bringing the practice of creation and spirituality back into the classroom in a tangible way. I wanted to bring back the spiritual practice that art had been in my life. In sum, not only the act of creating a piece of art, but the process that undergirds that creation. The work and discipline of noticing the big and small things in daily life and in the world as a response to so much death—death meted out by white supremacy, anti-Black racism, anti-Asian violence, heteronormativity, bigotry, and ableism, to name just some of what we were are living through.

I was also sick of words. Words can be full, but they can also be rather empty. People asking, "Hi, how are you?" without actually wanting to know. Sometimes there are things you feel, things you know, things that are ancestrally grounded in you that are unspeakable because they are so real and so incredibly meaningful. Sorrows and joys too deep to speak about in any coherent or fulsome way that an outsider could understand. There are things we experience that can't and won't be spoken about on demand. The days that we were living in felt heavy in this way: there weren't enough words to carry the weight of it all. I began to wonder if there was a different way to teach and participate in the expression of community and lived experiences without centering words, to instead allow the unspeakable things within to guide us in a semester-long online class.

I invited Rev. Darci Jaret, a local artist and theologian in Atlanta, to teach with me and we started working on creating our dream classroom. A space where students might use visual art to think theologically about art as a spiritual practice and a necessity for doing ministry and pastoral care in today's world. As part of planning for this course, now dubbed, Spirituality and the Arts, we decided there would be no graded written work and instead we would focus our time on accountability through shared process and artwork. Students would create six pieces of visual art which moved from their personal journey to their theological understanding of the Divine presence, to pieces inspired by artists like Gabriel Garcia Roman's Queer Icon series and Alvin Ailey's Revelations. We would paint, sketch, and sculpt. The pieces were connected to one another, spiraling out from self, back to community and the world, and back to the self. The final project would be a gift and blessing for another student in the class, a sending back into the world equipped to mend through a deeper appreciation of how the practice of making and praying through making changes our thinking, our theologies, and how we embody ourselves in the world.

A major shift we made for this class was to let go of weekly assignments. We would take space and time for each piece of art. Instead of having pieces due each week, we gave students two full weeks to complete each piece. They were asked to manage the time as they saw fit but to remain accountable to sharing their process with the group. Each week, students were given relevant material to read and watch, ranging from scholarship on spirituality and pastoral care through art to watching documentaries about the decolonization of societies and neighborhoods through art making. We thought of the scholarly material for each week as a place for grounding and growing inspiration, raising significant questions, and challenging bias. Art and creativity do not occur or appear on demand but like any living thing, are nurtured into being through acknowledgement, trying this or that, and deep contemplation of what we encounter in the world, in ourselves, and in others. We encouraged our artists to think about and wrestle with the course material and provide video updates on their process at the end of the first week of each project. We asked them to cheer one another on as some projects were easier or more difficult for people depending on what was being worked out through each piece. We often repeated that is ok to just read and think, and to start and start over. The only thing to submit for a grade was the piece of art at the end of each two-week period. Everything that occurred up to that point was part of the practice of learning to be in community through accountable process.

Part 3 – Art as Process

Pivots or shifts in our thinking away from western and colonially oriented epistemologies are hard. The academy is a colonial entity. It is invested in colonizing us, thoroughly and into generations; colonization of thought processes and embodiments, the way we collect knowledge, our communal epistemologies, and the way we assess for learning. For BIPOC this is especially painful because we are familiar with these processes of systematic and structural erasure. We know intimately the violence of colonial erasure on our bodies, our tongues, our names, and even our food. The colonial academy, as an extension of supremacist ideologies everywhere, strives to domesticate our expression ourselves and our experiences, the way we analyze those experiences, the way we believe, create, and recreate the same tools that keep us bound up. The academy has convinced us that measures and rubrics can help us determine if what people create holds meaning or value. Meaning and value for whom? I'm not saying we need to throw away all the rubrics. I don't hate rubrics. I am saying, we might consider that there are other ways to reflect back to students and ourselves how and what we are learning. However, the shift away from what we've asked ourselves and students to do from our earliest school years requires a lifetime of undoing. Often, we are learning and unlearning along with the students in our classrooms. The good news is that we can practice that cultural classroom shift together. Art can help us pivot if we let it.

Our artists found the pivot from a reading and writing classroom to a maker's classroom, disorienting at first. We could tell students felt like we would pull the rug out from under them at any moment. We were shifting from accountability to rubrics and grading scales to accountability to community and relationships. We practiced showing up for one another in vulnerability where one person's art was not better than another person's art, but just as meaningful, even if differently expressed. We were shifting from ordered time where we scrunched learning into one week after another with posts and responses as proof of learning, to a more suspended understanding of time and internal and external processing and contemplative time as work.

At first, this type of conversation occurred frequently:

Artist: "I don't have to write a research paper on this material?"
Professors: "No, it's there to inspire your creativity and challenge you. Show us what you've learned through your art and in your check-ins."
Artist: "So, I only have to purchase art supplies? There's no booklist?"
Professors: "Yes. Only art supplies. You are going to read, listen, and watch things in class, but we will provide them."
Artist: "I'm not a real artist, so does that mean I won't do well in this class?"
Professors: "You are a real artist. Did you do the piece? Did you colleagues and co-artists learn from your piece? Did you learn from their pieces? Show us how you are growing and being challenged. Push yourself and you'll do well."

As they started each piece, we asked artists to reflect on themselves, the tangle of pain and joy in their lived experiences, the world, current events, and what Spirit was saying to each of them through the work of their heart and hands. How was what emerged as a work of art both of them and of the divine presence? How was it both meant for themselves and for the community beyond them? Students started making art in their comfort zones, many of them started the course leaning on familiar mediums, sketching or painting. By the end of the course, artists had pressed themselves into using other mediums. At the conclusion of the semester, we had digital art, sculptures, wire art, woodwork, poetry, and photography. We incorporated oral storytelling in small and large group synchronous sessions. Artists told us the stories that inspired their work, their daily experiences, their theological reflections on the world, and even shared ancestral wisdoms with one another. Sometimes, in response to the stories and the histories, there was only silence. We silently and carefully held one another through our little zoom boxes on the screen. Silence also teaches. Silence is also part of the process.

Part 4 – Art Mends

There's a difference between mending and healing. When we talk of healing, we are talking about going back to the "before" times, back to the time before harm occurred. However, we can't always return to those places, can we? When we talk about mending, we are describing something being patched up but still bearing the scars of the injury or wound. During the process of learning how to teach and participate in this course, I witnessed the power of art to mend.

> **The pieces were connected to one another, spiraling out from self."**

At the end of each two-week period, our classroom of artists would upload images of their pieces to our course page. We would meet together for two to three hours to share our work, to discuss together the challenges of making each piece, and to mark the spiritual shifts taking place through the practice of making art in the midst of everything happening in the world and in our personal lives.

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Darci and I facilitated the conversation and took the posture of co-learners with the artists in the space. We realized quickly that the process of making and sharing art was a spiritual practice for our class in this pandemic learning time, because of the way it reconnected the threads to one another that were severed through online learning and lockdowns. It also connected us by holding space for the ongoing rage and grief we felt. During the semester, Black people were continually murdered by police and vigilantes, and as we witnessed together the aftermath of the Atlanta spa shootings of Asian women. Art and the process of creating art did not allow us to cover up our feelings. Art exposed the anger and grief we felt, utterly and viscerally. Art did not make room for short cuts and avoidance of those experiences and reactions that felt raw and painful. Every two weeks, we gathered to witness, learn, and confront what art had brought out in us and through us. We participated in visible mending. Art stitched us together in our grief, joy, and gratitude in a time that felt like crisis and chaos.

As part of each bi-weekly project, I posted a podcast discussing the material for the week together with current events and personal stories. The week of the Atlanta spa shootings hit me especially hard. I saw my mother and grandmothers in the faces and names of the women who were gunned down. Everything I knew and taught about U.S. imperialism, militarism, and the historic and policy-based sexualization of Asian women across the trans-pacific and here in the U.S. felt incredibly close. I kept thinking of every instance, and there have been many, where I or someone I knew was on the receiving end of anti-Asian racism and violence. I thought about the systematized invisibility of anti-Asian racism and violence and the gaslighting of Asian people at the denial of our histories and experiences. All of which were glaringly evident in the way police and the media reported on the Atlanta spa shootings. The rage bubbled over then, intermingled with the physical pain of grief, a burning spot in my chest that had been there my whole life, but felt suddenly unbearable. I wanted to cancel the podcast and cancel our class meet up for that week. I didn't have the energy or the filter to proceed as normal.

In a fog of grief, I swiftly wrote out the class cancelation email and the apology for the missing podcast, but I never sent it. After I wrote out the memo, I remembered what this class had shown and taught me through our weeks together. Art doesn't cover up. Art radically reveals. Art calls us to bear witness to the truth-telling limited by words alone. I showed up that week when it would have been perfectly acceptable to disengage. I reframed the podcast around the texts of the lives of Asian women throughout U.S. history and trans-pacific history. What did it mean to un-colonize the image and embodiment of Asian women through the eyes of the divine presence? To unmake the lies about Asian women as only flesh for white supremacist consumption through the practices and processes of art? What would that mean to and for me as an Asian and Korean American woman? At the end of our class meeting, we closed with a practice I call the Gaze of Gratitude. A practice I've developed as an online teaching ritual, for times when words fail. We used Zoom in gallery mode to scroll through each square, to behold each artist's face and without words, to gaze upon each person with gratitude and to allow that gratitude to peer and shine out of our eyes and expressions. I wept. I couldn't help it. I was once again in awe of the space that making and talking about art could facilitate; a space to reveal and contribute to necessary mending in community.

Part 5 – Art as Midwife

Art is a midwife of transformation and transmutation. Art transforms us through our encounter with it, both in the world and out of our hearts and hands. Art also transmutes what we've created into something meaningful and powerful for people other than ourselves. How many times have we written something, taught something, shared something, only to hear our students share with us that they received and heard something we would never have guessed?

A midwife helps to bring forth new life, but soon afterward, the midwife departs, and it is our responsibility to nurture and care for that new and sacred life. Something I can't quite name occurred in this class, and I don't know if there is a map or a listicle that can help me or you recreate it. Perhaps the beginning of the map emerges from the questions I began to pose in the midst of the chaos and death of 2020. Is what I'm teaching, what I'm asking students to internalize and wrestle with, speaking forward into our futures? Whose futures? Is what I'm teaching meeting the needs—embodied, individual, and communal—that are making themselves known in the classroom? Or is my teaching, my agenda, burying those needs, diminishing what is being excavated and surfaced in student's lives and in mine? Are participants, including myself, having to disengage with their innermost needs, their generational needs, to "learn"?

I don't know if I'll ever teach the Spirituality and the Arts class again. It was suspended time. A unique experience that I am still processing and trying to understand. I am transformed by it. I will never see my students the same way again. The way they taught one another and me out of the wealth of their experiences, through what their heart and hands made, astounded me.

Teaching art as theology and spirituality was a remarkable pivot from the face-to-face classroom and from the online classroom space that I had learned to carefully curate over the years. Centering art and art making as teacher felt like liminal space where the conditions, needs, questions, and urgency of the moment converged to build something that maybe couldn't or shouldn't be repeated. In many ways, this course took more out of me than any other class I've ever taught. It was also the pivot each of us needed in teaching and learning in theological education for these times.

The course was a shift into the now and the immediacy of our collective consciousness and bodies moving through painful and joyful times together. The class was a shift into thinking beyond isolation, beyond death and death-dealing, into growing and truth telling. Art, both the process of making and sharing what we made, midwifed our anger, sorrow, grief, and joy in ways that a traditional course might not have made possible. It felt raw and holy. As a spiritual practice, our time together learning about the connection between art, spirituality, and theology became a collective prayer in many voices, uttering both similar and dissonant cries, chaotic and beautiful at the same time. We are each still discovering the ways in which the course, now complete, is ushering forth transformation and transmutation in our lives and being. And yes, everyone received an "A," whatever that means now.

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When Teaching Pivots to Meet the "Fierce Urgency of Now"

William Yoo
Columbia Theological Seminary

For the past twelve months, I have made several pivots in my teaching to meet what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. identified in his 1967 speech on the war in Vietnam at The Riverside Church in New York City as "the fierce urgency of now." Dr. King began by affirming the activists from Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam for their moral vision in organizing people together with the following call: "A time comes when silence is betrayal." Dr. King then connected the organization's call with his own challenge to act for peace in Vietnam and join in the global struggle against poverty and racism: "We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there is such a thing as being too late."

In addition to teaching through a global pandemic, we are tasked with the responsibility to educate toward racial, social, and intersectional justice. We teach in different disciplines and at diverse institutions, but we inhabit the same world. We live in a world where millions marched to protest the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, anti-Black racism, and police brutality in May, June, and July. We all witnessed the violent insurrection and mob violence at the U.S. Capitol on January 6. More recently, we grieve and rage at the horrific murders of Soon Chung Park, Hyun Jung Grant, Suncha Kim, Yong Ae Yue, Delaina Ashley Yaun, Xiaojie Tan, Daoyou Feng, and Paul Andre Michels across several spas in metro Atlanta on March 16.

In meeting "the fierce urgency of now," my teaching pivots, as an historian of Christianity in the United States, to reveal that the scourge of hate and violence against Black, Indigenous, and other Persons of Color and the sins of white supremacy and misogyny have roots in Christian traditions with long records and unjust legacies of nativism, settler colonialism, sexism, and slavery. I have pivoted to share honestly with students about how my education at a predominantly white and theologically conservative seminary left me unprepared to confront the challenges before us because of several pedagogical imbalances and gaps. The pedagogies of my professors overemphasized the courageous ministries of Christian heroines and heroes who strove to combat injustice and underemphasized the complicity of Christians in perpetuating discrimination and hate against women, persons of color, and LGBTQIA+ persons. These pedagogies also elevated white men by treating their perspectives as normative and either erased women, persons of color, and LGBTQIA+ persons or reduced the presence of "diverse" voices to recommended (versus required) readings or one isolated lesson under a mishmash of topics.

With this pivot, I am implicitly prompting students to assess what they are learning in my classroom as well as in the classrooms of my colleagues at our seminary. Is my pedagogy as a teacher better than what I experienced as a student? Does the teaching and learning at my seminary connect in meaningful ways with the congregations and ministry contexts our students inhabit? In reflecting with my students over the past year, I can offer two insights.

The first insight is that pivots to address anti-Black, anti-Asian, and other forms of racial injustice are most helpful when they reinforce and strengthen existing course content. When a course syllabus already contains multiple lessons about communities of color with assigned readings from many scholars of color, pivots to cover urgent events are organically integrated to the foundational structure of the teaching and learning. When a pivot requires the introduction of different lessons or a sudden detour to new assigned readings, it may reveal a larger imbalance or gap in the course syllabus specifically and teaching philosophy more broadly.

The second insight is that pivots are generative and effective when they cultivate collaboration in the classroom. In other words, a pivot works best as an invitation to learn together with students rather than an opportunity to be the "sage on the stage" with all the prescriptions to the world's most pressing problems. One of the most useful prompts in my pivots is to ask students to share what is happening in their families and communities of faith and to discuss together how certain religious beliefs in our diverse Christian traditions have shaped different responses to racial, social, and intersectional justice in the forms of righteous activity, passive inactivity, and hateful violence. Heeding Dr. King's message, we seek to confront "the fierce urgency of now" through genuine, vulnerable, and collaborative dialogue engaging the challenges, prejudices, and opportunities in our communities of faith.

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A Question of Pedagogy

Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder
Chicago Theological Seminary

I like questions. Interrogatives entice me. Answers are low-hanging fruit. Social media lends towards making everyone an expert, and experts tend to have all of the answers. However, questions can change the course of a conversations. Inquiries make space for new ideas, new practices, new programs, and new ways of being.

As a biblical scholar questions from this text appeal to me. God asks Cain, "Where is your brother Abel? (Genesis 4.9)" The Lord inquires of Ezekiel, "Can these bones live? (Ezekiel 37:3)" Jesus quizzes the crowd, "Who touched me? (Luke 8:45)" Each question respectively provides a lesson on communal accountability, national atonement, and social acceptance.

Questions can change the course of a conversation. Questions allow one to pivot an approach to pedagogy.

Before I begin class, I often ask my students, "How are you? How's it going?" There is no rush to exegesis, cultural studies, biblical interpretation, or any path to hermeneutics. I frequently start our sessions checking in and making space just to sit, hear, and be. It is challenging to process words and thoughts of people distant from us when we are wrestling with trauma and pain close to home.

Since March these moments have taken on more meaning. It is one thing to pause not knowing what is unraveling in another person's life. It is quite another to stop when what stumps you, also stumps me. To begin class unaware of any individual difficulty presents one type of challenge. However, when there is a communal, national, global vicissitude that is no respecter of persons, the classroom becomes a place where traditional pedagogical hierarchy is impudent and irrelevant. Yes, there is the professor, and of course, there are students. Yet, an invisible pathogen called COVID-19 has compromised all displays of visible power.

In our current context asking, "How are you?" takes on new meaning. As I ask my students about their well-being, it gives me the space to ask myself, "How am I doing?" Such fragile moments thrust professors to center stage of navigating self-care and classroom-care. In this pandemic when each day there is a startling increase in cases, a rising death toll, and still little progress towards a vaccine, pedagogy and pastoring have become strange bedfellows. Such times call for professors to tap into emotional reserves while discerning portals of spiritual connection. Our tasks before reading essays, facilitating conversations, or sharing our slides via Zoom, require that we don ecclesial attire, access priestly garb, and step into the role of professor-pastor-priest-rabbi-iman-cleric-shaman-spiritual sage.

I am not belittling these much-needed roles by suggesting they are easily or readily adaptable.

These professions require much credentialing and processes. As an ordained National Baptist and Disciples of Christ minister, I know this from experience. I must admit that prior to this COVID-19 crisis, I kept "Rev." out of the classroom so "Dr." would carry the day. Today is a new day. Both must enter fully in light of this global disease and dis-ease.

Now I ask new questions before we dive into the gospels, epistles, Jesus, or the mother of James and John. Here are the inquiries from which my pedagogy now proceeds:

1. **What gives you joy**? Social media and health reports make it the default to dwell on the negative. To seek joy in a death-dealing context is fodder for educational reform. Our coronavirus-context focuses on the pessimistic. The classroom should be the place for cultivating the positive even when its opposite seems overwhelming. As a professor, I want my pedagogy to challenge the norm, even as we live during abnormal times.

2. **What worries you?** We do not teach in a socio-political or socio-economic vacuum. Students had worries and angst pre-COVID-19. But now, families, finances, challenges to faith, physical wellness, and friendships have all undergone some shifting. Our students', and our, anxieties about these and other matters are more pronounced. While wrestling with this pandemic, students remain curious about finishing the semester.

3. **I wish** . . . Okay so these last two are not questions, but they seek information nonetheless. Fill in the blank queries offer a way for students to express how they feel. To engage in wishful thinking provides a forum for helping us see that things won't be like this always. A pedagogical pivot to wishing helps us ponder and put into place what we project for the future.

4. **I am grateful for** . . . When the gravitas of sheltering in place can weigh heavily on all of us, finding something for which to be grateful is paramount. This should not be an exercise in comparison or competition, but an act of contemplative practice in chaos. This is a practice of thanksgiving in the center of turmoil.

Questions can change the course of a conversation. Questions allow us to pivot our approach to pedagogy. Questions help us pray through until we get through.

"To seek joy in a death-dealing context is fodder for educational reform."

Write Your Name Claiming Space and Writing Ourselves into Existence

Carol B. Duncan
Wilfrid Laurier University

"Write your name, for me, please," she asked, a sturdy index finger tapping on a piece of paper, on the table at my aunt's house. She was my paternal grandmother, Johanna, or Teacher Kate, as many people called her, and she was visiting her family in Toronto from Guyana. She would have been in her sixties then, a compact Black woman with flawless skin, a kind, steady gaze, and a resonant alto speaking voice. You could hear the mixture of crisp and precise British-influenced English that would have been expected of schoolteachers of Teacher Kate's generation, born before World War I, in a corner of Amazonia and at the edge of the British Empire. You could also hear the rhythms of Caribbean creole speech, reflecting Guyana's cultural legacy of majority populations descended from enslaved Africans and indentured folk from the Indian subcontinent and China, among others. Teacher Kate's work in classrooms with children began before 1930 as a pupil-teacher, a form of teaching apprenticeship of young teenagers that was regularly practiced in the English-speaking Caribbean, in the early decades of the twentieth century.

"Write your name, for me, please." It was a directive, an invitation, and a question all rolled into one as we gathered around my aunt's dining table. This was the late 1970s, pre-Internet, and I was in my early teens and already in high school. At that point, I had attended school for almost a decade split between Antigua and Canada, having spent my infancy in England, the country of my birth, as a child of the Windrush migration. The late 1970s was a magical transitional time in Black musical cultures as it was the era of the earliest commercial hip hop recordings, disco, funk, and R n' B. We also listened to reggae, dancehall, calypso, and soca, Caribbean popular musical genres as well, new wave, punk and pop and rock n' roll on AM and FM radio—our musical choices reflecting our transnational existence between recent Caribbean memories, the larger social context of a rapidly changing Canadian cultural landscape, contemporary Black Toronto realities in the Caribbean diaspora with close sonic and familial ties to major urban centres in the US and England to which Caribbean people had migrated. My friends and I emulated the look of the Pointer Sisters, The Emotions, or women lead vocalists in Chic. In our stylistic ambitions, we existed on a continuum of retro 1940s, church, and our imagined Studio 54. Our looks were achieved through making our own clothes with Simplicity and Butterick patterns, and reworking and mending heavily discounted seconds (discarded mass-produced clothing with what we considered minor and correctible mistakes like crooked seams and missing buttons) purchased cheaply in the garment district in downtown Toronto. That day I wore a belted, light beige, cap-sleeved dress in a shimmery fabric. My hair was still natural, a few years away from its 1980s curly perm, and picked out into a 'fro. This was the late 1970s and in Black diasporic girl stylistic cultures in my corner of Toronto afros, cornrows, and other natural styles still reigned supreme with the occasional hot comb pressed straight styles for special occasions. I wondered why Teacher Kate would want me to write my name as an introduction to who I was as a student and her granddaughter. Why not ask me to read out loud or to recite memorized passages of poetry, bible verses, or dramatic plays? I had already had lots of practice in public speaking at school and in church, in Canada, where my first recitation was Langston Hughes' poem "Freedom." I remembered the church assembly in the Jamaican Pentecostal congregation that met in the basement of a

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stream Protestant church in our Toronto neighbourhood, now called Little Jamaica. We were Anglicans but my mother insisted that we go to the church down the road and around the corner from our house that we could reach without crossing a major intersection, and where our friends from school, recently arrived kids from the Caribbean, also went to church.

"Write your name for me, please." So, I picked up the pen and I wrote my first name in cursive and print. "Write your whole name." I wrote my first and last name. My grandmother inspected my writing and complimented it while also giving some pointers to improve the cursive. "Write it larger," she said. I wrote my name several times and each time I did so with more confidence than earlier versions. Now, I wrote my name every day in school on assignments and had done so for years. My friends and I even practiced our autographs. I had written my name years ago in my British passport as an elementary school student. This occasion, however, felt different. In the analog world of the late 1970s, just a few years before the launch of the digital age, my grandmother was inviting me to come to the table of knowledge, to take up space, and to write myself into the narrative in my own hand, boldly and confidently and with style. Words mattered. I got it. I created my signature in that moment with its large cursive letters. Teacher Kate lived for over three decades after that night, in total just over a hundred years. By the late 1970s she had already taught several generations doing the hard work in the post-slavery and British colonial era of the first half of the twentieth century of teaching literacy. Many had entered Guyana and other Caribbean territories as transports of empire through the forced migrations of the slave trade and indentureship, without signature—perhaps an "x," or even a thumbprint for the latter. I was only Teacher Kate's student for that one evening but I learned a crucial lesson of accepting the invitation to take my place and to write my name and write myself into being.

Educational Design: When Tweaking the System Just Won't Do

Nancy Lynne Westfield
The Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion

Unprecedented, novel, first-time - these are accurate descriptors of the pandemic. This harsh and slowly unfolding, global crisis has triggered: national and international quarantine; all of education simultaneously moving online; re-established family routines to include homeschooling and working from home – sometimes on the same dining room table; elders separated and feeling abandoned in care facilities; rebooted work lives to exclude travel and mercilessly increased digital meetings; recalibrated sense of security to include the uncertainty of not knowing when the "all clear" will be sounded.

The imaginary parent manual does not include home schooling for all the children at a moment's notice. There is no section in the faculty handbook for when students go-missing during crisis pedagogy. There is no research which proves the brain atrophies with each minute of Zoom conferencing. What do leaders do when there is no experience to draw upon? What do we do when we are faced with a challenge never before faced? If, as they say, "experience is the best teacher" - what does one do in this unprecedented societal upheaval?

Like most young people, I had little patience when my parents referenced their experiences for my learning. My impatience increased when their recollected stories were utilized as a warning or to point out about my shortcomings. I had little interest in conversations which started with, "when I was a child…" or "back in my day…" Now, I, at the tender age of mid-to-late 50's, have an appreciation for my parent's wisdom teachings because I now realize the value of learning from and mining previous experiences. However, this pandemic, in a digital age, is most certainly without precedent. My hunch is that drawing too deeply upon the faux simile of past experience will not equip us to grapple with the current upheaval or the too slowly coming future.

By now, we all have participated in conversations comparing this historic moment to 9/11 or comparing this to NYC in the HIV epidemic or comparing this pandemic to the pandemic of 1918 or comparing this moment to the many episodes of "the plague" throughout history. While we can draw comparisons, we already know this is not any of those events. This is significantly different. Those comparisons seem not big enough, not violent enough, of too small a scope or not close enough to home. As we search for previous experience from which to extrapolate for this moment, we come up short. What do you do when you have never had to do for such a time as this?

The first impulse is to do …. do something, do anything that provides a flurry of activity that looks like you are in charge, knowledgeable, and making a difference. Leaders begin to organize and strategize in categories such as immediate plans, intermediate plans, and longrange plans. I know I did. The uniqueness of this exhausting pandemic is that it is still unfolding, it is still unfurling. We cannot see around the corner. We cannot see over the hill into the intermediate or into the long term. The first impulse "to do" makes sense, but it is feeble and lacks deep consideration for the current reality. The danger will not pass until a vaccine is made and widely distributed or until a cocktail of medications is approved. What do you do when you cannot, realistically, plan?

Perhaps, in unprecedented situations, the better doing of leaders is to pause; not an idle pause, but the kind of pause to rethink, reconceive, reengineer based upon the ever-changing crisis.

We tend to think of waiting as being idle or complacent. In this case, I am suggesting taking time to in waiting as time of watching, observing, rethinking, dreaming. Waiting, in unprecedented times, might mean watching the changes, observing the signs, listening both inside and outside of yourself and of your community. Waiting as imagining the next steps, fantasying possibilities, even when it is not clear what is possible. Moving into a mode of waiting is a recognition that adaptation, contingency, or revision will not work for the long haul in this unprecedented time. Waiting, pausing, listening might mean the recognition that what is needed to move forward is new design, newfangled ways, and innovative teaching models.

Several deans and presidents are making a three-pronged plan for the fall semester. First, they plan to, as soon as possible, get back to business as usual – face to face education in the fall. Then, if there is a second wave of COVID 19, they plan to move the teaching to online for a prescribed period of time with plans to return to face to face before semester's end. Third, if the virus wave lasts a long time, they will move the teaching to online for an extended period of time or through the end of the semester. The challenge of the three-pronged plan is that most institutions do not have the where-with-all for such nimbleness. Staffing and teaching, while attempting to pivot between a three-pronged plan, is beyond the institutional capacity of most schools. And, we have learned that moving from face-to-face syllabi to online teaching results in crisis pedagogy and not thoughtful, quality, online pedagogy. A three-pronged contingency plan would need three syllabi.

The strategies I hear good administrators planning are simply too simple to meet the complex and vexing times we suddenly are hit by. This strategy will be like a band aid for a gaping wound. It is speculated that viral waves will be active in the future. It is suspected, just like the flu and cold season we are accustomed to, this highly fatal strain of virus will mutate and join the cycle of flu and cold seasons. Based upon this speculation, it would behoove us not to modify education as if the virus will someday go away. We have to design new educational models as if the virus, in some form, is now part of our educational universe. The virus is now our new normal.

Rather than responding by tweaking education, suppose we spend this time redesigning education?

Most of us are not trained in educational design. The best educational leaders are rarely proficient at navigating ambiguity or guiding faculties, staff, trustees and institutions when we cannot see around corners or over the crest of the hill. The institutions who have made the most radical changes have been due to financial distress. I suspect schools who are financially sound will also need to redesign.

The redesign of education might actually be over due and only exacerbated by COVID 19 pandemic. The uncertainty of this moment, if we pause and stop tweaking, can be a time to take stock of the larger uncertainty in our society which affects education. The pandemic has divulged the complexity of societal problems which must be considered if education is to be redesigned.

The social complexities which affect education are many and quite dense. Technology is ever changing. The volatility of stock markets and international economic trends are difficult to predict. The groaning of climate change, the strained health care system, the rise in white supremacy, basic democratic practices are stymied by voter suppression and widespread corruption. Student loan debt is crippling. The denominational church has shattered. The industrial prison complex has destroyed countless families. Homelessness and poverty are at an all-time high. Without giving way to nihilism, there is a pervasive, looming and lingering feeling that almost nothing is certain and the tectonic plates of society are rocking and rolling. There are no quick fixes for a new design of education. There is no one answer for this challenge and no one leader to this moment. Redesigning education will need our best minds, our best imagineers, our best teams of collaborators.

The Wabash Center, in conversation with colleagues, has begun to think about ways we can support colleagues as we grapple with redesigning theological and religious education. What is possible? What new communal epistemologies will guide us? Who, beyond conventional educational arenas, will we invite into the collaboration? What will it mean to deepen and broaden our digital imaginations? What if the work of education is, as bell hooks has said, to teach transgression? What will the newly reconceived education look it, smell like, taste like, feel like, sound like, be like?

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Artmaking in the Classroom and the Possibilities of Incantation

Yohana Junker
Claremont School of Theology

During the past year, two of my favorite Brazilian writers and educators, Luiz Antonio Simas and Luiz Rufino collaborated on yet another book: Encantamento: Sobre a Política da Vida (Incantation: On the Politics of Life). One of the central affirmations of their work (which follows their previous co-authored publications: A Pedagogy of the Crossroads, An Arrow Through Time, and The Enchanted Science of Macumbas) is that the opposite of life isn't death—it is desencantamento, or an inability to surrender to a process of incantation. As a verb, incantare evokes our capacity to fuse song and word in an effort to raise our spirits, to spark magic in our imaginations, to invite divine presence. Our capacity to incantate spaces of learning does precisely what theologian Rubem Alves invites us to do: name and invoke the not-yet worlds, so as to break the spells of right-here worlds that continue to abandon, oppress, exclude, and sever from ourselves and our communities of belonging.

Incantation as a poetic of resistance allows us to escape, disobey, and ambush the traps set through the colonial matrix of power so that bodies can dare to see, create, invent, and integrate new possibilities freedom, belonging, and liberation through creativity and imagination. Incantation, Simas and Rufino affirm, nests our capacity to move through time, to experience a passage between forms and worlds, to change our points of reference through a politic of life that is rooted in an imprinting of the everyday as rites of reading and writing different poetic routes capable of setting traps to our collective loss of hope and vivacity.[i] In this sense, incantation is an exercise in emergence and survivance that lives and breathes beyond the terrorizing effects of coloniality. It's the commitment to movement, occupation, visibility, insertion, and participation. It's the creative force that travels through crossroads of knowledge-making, confronting hierarchizations produced by ontological, epistemological, and semiotic violences.

Art, as I understand it, has a tremendous power to forge incantatory pathways of resistance because of its capacity to dis-educate us from disciplinary molding. It reverberates and discloses to us that which is hidden in our interior recesses in embodied, striking, and visceral ways. It can help us re-educate our affections, as Paulo Freire puts it, or work a kind of magic in our souls, as bell hooks states. It also inspires us to name the world as we see it, and to find a poetic tongue when the language we know fails us. It helps us resist, heal, connect, conjure, and tend to all our relations. As generative clearings, the arts are sites for world-making, for dreaming, rehearsing, and choreographing new possibilities of being and intervening in the world. When we immerse ourselves in acts of artmaking, we have the opportunity to access the visceral, the somatic life of the body, its reflexes, limits, intuition, responses, desires, needs, and its alchemies. When we encourage and invite students to in-corporate artmaking processes as they engage readings, discussions, and bodies of knowledge, we participate in this politic of incantation.

A student's performance and ritual entitled "Disposable Beauty" still stands as one of the most profound and generative projects to which I have been witness. As a final integrative assignment, the performance consisted of placing delicate flower arrangements throughout locations in her neighborhood that were marked by abuse, violence, and abandonment. Such poetic gestures in vulnerable spaces in the city sought to raise awareness of our transience, interdependence, and negligence in the face of injustice.

The flower assemblages were made out of blossoms and foliage that flower shops would throw away at the end of the day. This poetic gesture both incantated and resisted the (i)logic of degradation, disposability, oppression, and inequity by orienting herself and participants in acts of creative wonder. Through her invocation of not-yet worlds, she extended a gesture of care, of regard, of re-worlding, refusing to be desencantada with the world around her. At the end of these performances, she invited folks to partake in tea ceremonies that were rooted in offering the gift of reciprocity, spiritual care, regard, and a warm cup of tea. As a poetic of incantation, her artistic gestures imbued spaces of desolation, disposability, and abandonment with love, presence, and beauty through a practice that integrated the semester's resources, readings, discussions and questions with her own wisdom, creativity, and spiritual sensibilities.

I return to this experience often to remind myself to continuously ask how many of the assignments outlined in my syllabi impede or foster poetic and incantatory experimentations.

Notes

[i] See Luiz Antonio Simas and Luiz Rufino, Encantamento: Sobre Política de Vida (Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Morula Editorial, 2020).

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Trading PowerPoint for Play-doh

Karyn L. Wiseman,
United Lutheran Seminary (formerly Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia)

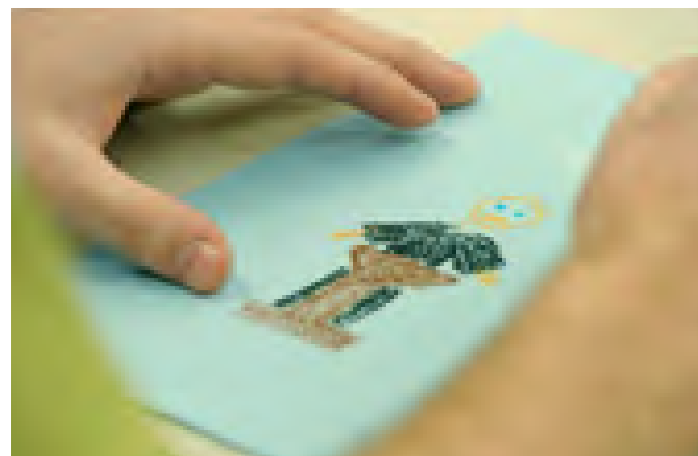
One of my goals is to be as creative as I can be – in my preaching and teaching. I have not always thought that I was creative, but I have come to appreciate my creativity more in the last few years. However, it's often very hard to convince others of their creativity. Most people, in my experience, when asked if they are creative, quickly answer, "No." A few years ago I ran across Julia Cameron's book, The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity. Through it I was reminded that we are ALL created by the Divine Creator to be creative.

Many of my preaching students answer that creativity question with a big NO, as well. But preaching requires creativity – in crafting a sermon, finding images and metaphors, and presenting the sermon in an engaging and creative manner. Getting students to acknowledge that reality, come to own it, and embrace their creativity has meant trying something new for me as a professor.

My preaching classes every semester have a "Play-doh Day" when we look at a number of preaching texts and then spend time playing with them to find images and metaphors for preaching. We start by having a conversation for about 20 minutes of a 2-hour class session about creativity and I use a few sections from Cameron's book as conversation starters. And then I break out the crayons, colored paper, play-doh, and other crafting supplies and the students begin to work on expressing their creativity around those ideas.

They pick an idea from the text and find a concrete image or metaphor to use in the exercise. Then they have time to create something with Play-doh or crayons that expresses that. I try to create a relaxed environment for this activity by playing music and letting students work casually on their creative expressions. Many students have created some very good artwork – stick figures are ok and affirmed – and have found ideas that others in the room never would have thought of. But not everyone finds their groove.

A big piece of the learning is moving around the room as students describe and show their artwork. Teaching with crayons and Play-doh is an amazing way to teach without lecturing but some will still balk at owning their creativity.



Theology in Sound and Motion: Perichoresis, for Brass Quintet

Delvyn Case
Wheaton College Massachusetts

John of Damascus, one of the most important theologians of Eastern Orthodox Christianity, writes the following about the relationship between the three Persons of the Trinity:

> *[They] dwell and are established firmly in one another. For they are inseparable and cannot part from one another, but keep to their separate courses within one another, without coalescing or mingling, but cleaving to each other. For the Son is in the Father and the Spirit: and the Spirit in the Father and the Son: and the Father in the Son and the Spirit, but there is no coalescence or commingling or confusion. And there is one and the same motion: for there is one impulse and one motion of the three subsistences, which is not to be observed in any created nature.*

The Greek word "perichoresis" has come to refer not only to this multi-dimensional, incomprehensible unity, but to a particular metaphor describing this relationship: that of a "divine dance" between/among/within the Trinity.

My composition Perichoresis[1] is my musical impression of this "divine dance." Its overall mood is joyous, an ecstatic whirling-about in which all three members become lost in the ecstasy of divine fellowship. At the exact moment of the dance when one member moves, the other fills in the spot left vacant. Seen from afar, the effect might be like looking at a spinning wheel whose spokes disappear from view, yet which retains its speed, energy, and power. Musically, this occurs through the technique of giving each of the five instruments their own, equally important roles to play. In the fast sections there is no clear melody that dominates the texture, relegating the other parts to mere accompaniment. Instead, each musical "voice" contributes its own unique and independent strand, each often winding around the others in a musical version of indwelling. The complementary rhythms and melodies often make it difficult to distinguish these layers, yet the absence of any one of them would leave an obvious hole in the musical fabric.

Musical textures create a sonic example of an ideal community: one body, many parts, and none more important or unique than the other. Unlike visual art-forms, music brings to life these types of complex relationships in ways that make sense to us humans. Music allows us to hear individual parts at the same time as we hear the whole that they create. The bassline of a Beyoncé track is 100% funky without anything else. Yet, when part of a family of

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horn riffs, drum loops, background singers, and lead vocals, that constituent element takes on a new identity. It is the same as it was, yet completely different: a new thing, yet not new at all. Its beginning is its ending, its Alpha already its Omega.

The Trinity expands upon this idea by challenging us to imagine a mutual interpenetration of the parts and the whole.

As a teacher, a composer, and member of the Body of Christ, this is the model of community for which I strive. In the classroom or the rehearsal studio my goal is to create an environment in which my students and I take turns leading the "dance." But this only happens when I get out of the way, when I recognize that my students are not small-scale versions of myself, but rather young people whose lived experiences are fertile sources of knowledge.

In the classroom, this happens when I allow a discussion to take on a life of its own, skipping down paths I didn't even know were on the map. In orchestra rehearsals it happens when a French horn player's phrasing opens up a new dimension of musical interpretation, changing the way I conduct an entire passage. In both situations, the requirement is that I stop trying to hear the content of my student's ideas, and instead listen to the ways those ideas express their full humanity—when I listen through or beyond their words to understand who they are. When this happens, the space I vacate does not remain empty, but is immediately filled with a presence: a person whose life is both similar to mine and different, and with whom I can now collaborate as co-learner and co-teacher.

As in the classroom and the rehearsal hall, however, there are many moments in Perichoresis when certain parts come to the fore and others step back. In the slow middle section, a lyrical melody ebbs and flows, sometimes played by one instrument and sometimes joined by a partner. But even in these moments we don't lose sight of our ideal vision of community. The melodies only sing because the ground beneath them allows them to stand. Conversely, the accompanying chords draw their notes from the melody, taking a line and turning it into an object: something solid and substantial. When I'm lecturing or leading discussion, I try to remember that I don't need to be the melody. While my voice may be the most prominent at those moments, thinking of myself as the accompaniment is a way for me to recontextualize my role. My words can be the fertile soil for my students' nascent ideas, the ground on which they can learn how to stand.

I don't always get there. As a teacher, husband, father, or church member, I often find myself singing the melody before I'm even aware of it! As I learn how to undo years of uncritical acceptance of my importance as a white guy, it's helpful for me to look to music as a model: it is, after all, the most evanescent of all artforms, a will-o'-the-wisp that disappears as quickly as we hear it. Its fundamental weakness, however, belies an extraordinary power: power that can change hearts and minds—but only if we allow it in, if we really listen to it.

My hope is that listening to my composition will help you think in new ways about the Trinity. Perhaps it will help you imagine how three Persons can be One, or One Person can be Three. And perhaps, the next time you listen to music, you might even be inspired to take it as a model for your life as a teacher, leader, or community member: a model based on relationships, mutual indwelling, and the joy of the dance.

[1] Composed by Delvyn Case, and premiered by Boston's Triton Brass Quintet, Perichoresis has also been performed by the Grammy-winning Chestnut Brass Company. Of this piece, theologian Walter Brueggemann wrote, "I am not a great theologian but have pondered 'perichoresis' for a long time. This is the finest exposition of that thick idea that I have encountered."

The audio is available here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4GoHExKMJLk.

What Has Romans to Do with Flickr? Imag(in)ing the Apostle Paul

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The Apostle Paul lived in a world full of visual media. From inscriptions to monuments, the ancient world was a bonanza of sights. Our students today also live in a world dominated by visual media. From websites to television, our digital screens are powerful vistas into an ever-changing world.

And yet my students so often encounter the letters of Paul as plain text. It is difficult to recreate the multi-dimensional experience of hearing Paul's letters read in a house church in the middle of a jostling city. It is difficult to help students imagine the visual realities that attended the lives of these Pauline communities.

But it is just as difficult to help students imagine how these texts take flesh in communities of faith today. It is just as difficult to help equip them to use various kinds of media in their teaching, preaching, and leading in worship.

So, instead of lecturing on the too frequently neglected closing chapters of Romans, I assign groups of students a particular section of these texts. Their assignment is to search on Flickr for three pictures that illustrate, capture, and/or illuminate their assigned verses. The pictures have to be available under a Creative Commons License, (Download Creative Commons on Flickr instructions) which is an initiative meant to encourage artists to share their work with others. These are pictures whose creators want their work to be used under the rules of open-source access. A pdf with step-by-step instructions I hand out to my students is available here. The first time I tried this assignment I was struck by the creativity exhibited by my students. With a limited amount of time to discover their pictures, they created fascinating connections between the images they chose and Romans. For instance, one group drew visual parallels between Paul's exhortation of Christian communities in Romans 12 and comic book superheroes. At the same time, some groups made rather rigid connections between the text and their images. Books and clouds and church buildings dominated some presentations. In the future, I will have to discern how to push students beyond easy or trite visual connections to the text at hand.

What are my hopes with this assignment? First, I want to invite my students to think about how they might teach and preach the biblical text using visual media, a vital ministerial skill in this era of digital interaction. Second, I hope to encourage students to be creative and thoughtful in their conceptualizing of Pauline theology. Last, I want students to engage with the Scriptures beyond the epistemological and methodological constraints of writing assignments.

So, does it work? I think so though the assignment needs some tweaks, of course. In the end, this was one small way to connect two worlds dominated by visual media.

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Teaching in Times of Ferguson: A Personal Reflection on Social Justice Pedagogy in a Theological School

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Meadville Lombard Theological School

AS I GEARED UP TO TEACH TWO SOCIAL JUSTICE THEMED COURSES THIS FALL, my summer preparations were disrupted by the news of two tragedies and the reflections they prompted. First was the death of Omar Abrego, beaten to death by police on August 2 in Los Angeles. Witness reports claim that Abrego was taken out of his car and beaten up by two police officers for at least 10 minutes and left in a pool of blood. The father of three would die hours later in a hospital. The reports were unclear as to the reasons that led to Abrego being stopped that evening, the details of his beating, and his death. A week later Michael Brown, an unarmed Black teenager, was left to bleed to death in the middle of a street in Ferguson, Missouri, after being shot by a police officer who claimed to have feared for his life - leaving me to ponder how the fear of an armed white police officer is reason enough to claim the life of a black youth. These were but two reminders of the vulnerability of Black and Brown peoples in the United States, two more victims in too long a list of those who died in acts of police brutality over the last few years. These tragedies, and the communal responses to them, led me to rethink, yet again, about my own body, and about my body in a pedagogical space, and about my practices as a social justice educator.

Two questions drive my reflections here. The first is how my body signifies in a classroom in times marked by these unfolding contentious events and what these events reveal about our societal dealings with questions of race and racism. In current times, it is not only that the renewed public relevance of matters of race and the everydayness of violence against people of color call for ongoing critique of systemic structures of oppression and the pervasiveness of micro-aggressions people of color endure everyday. It is also that these structural inequalities and micro-aggressions shape the pedagogical space and influence pedagogical choices. Theological schools are not immune to the distorting influences of structural inequalities and micro-aggressions. The underrepresentation of faculty of color in theological education, and the experiences of isolation they report, point to the possibility that pedagogical spaces for theological education are, more often than not, hostile contexts for faculty of color to live out their teaching vocation.[1] Meaning that faculty of color in theological education deal on a daily basis with the combined effects of unequal structures and forms of micro-aggressions inside and outside of the classroom, in the theological as well as in the secular space. How much more would these experiences, and their bodies, matter in moments of heightened social conflicts? Do we give credence to the growing chorus of detractors claiming that race should no longer be relevant as an issue in setting the social justice agenda of our day–because, how is racism possible in a post-racial society? As the body count of people of color grows, do we engage attempts to downplay the enduring legacy of racism head-on or do we reformulate our critiques to more palatable post-racial parlance? Every educator of color, and those outside white-male heteronormativity, continuously deal with the ways in which our bodies interrupt the pedagogical space. Am I seen as capable enough? Should I be taken seriously? Did I say that only because I am a person of color? Do we have to talk about race, again? Our pedagogical practices are challenged to engage these times with a sharp mind, a zealous heart for justice, and an ongoing commitment to challenge structures of oppression and practices that devalue the lives of those at the margin of power. It is a struggle to challenge those worldviews that dehumanize and are continually bent to destroy the present and future of communities of color, while all along seeking to forget their past. In a society that proclaims the beginning of a post-racial era, a person's race is still a determinant factor of whether a person lives or dies.

Even with the increase of technology mediated interactions, a primary way in which students interact with their lead instructors is through their physical presence: the shape, color, and gender of their bodies and the ways in which they carry that body through the space of the classrooms; the speed with which they move, and how much of that space they use; the timber of their voice and how they inflect it to make a point or respond to a question; the pace of their speech and the use of silence in teachable moments. Bodies matter because, at a micro-level, they are manifestations in the rooms in which they are present, of macro-level webs of signification in which they exist. These bodies are imputed social meanings that set construed parameters of action, that shape how they are perceived and what they are supposed to do. Educators of color and those whose identities lie outside the white-male heterosexual construct, then face a task of working through the meanings that are imputed to their bodies and what those bodies are taken to represent. The power such representations have over the pedagogical space cannot be underestimated.

The second question that drives my reflections here is how such awareness shapes my pedagogical practices in teaching contexts in which bodies of color are not the norm. As an educator of color in a theological institution, I find myself continually engaged in considering the ways in which concerns for social justice influence my pedagogy in light of the ways my body signifies just by being there, by occupying the pedagogical space. In a nutshell, I was forced this summer to consider at a deeper level two of my driving pedagogical questions: "What are you about?" and "How do you become a worthy ancestor?" As a young man of color, and son of the Black diaspora in the Americas, I am deeply aware that my education, achievements, and current social status are not protection against the violence of a society that daily claims the lives of people of color. I could be in the classroom one night living out my vocation as an educator, and the next morning commentary on my broken body could be occupying the news.

The task of social justice pedagogy, and particularly the pedagogy of those of us engaged in critiquing racist practices, takes place in a time that contends the relevance of race. Ironically, these positions that herald the end of racism, take shape at a time that sees the continual erosion of hard fought civil rights gains for communities of color, such as affirmative action legislation, the ongoing political, educational, and economic disenfranchisement that curtails full flourishing of the present and future of Black and Brown communities due to incarceration, unemployment, and the crumbling safety net -- and of course, public neo-lynching spectacles of people of color by police force. How else could the beating to death of a Brown man be named, or the shooting and bleeding to death in the middle of a street, and in broad daylight, of a Black young man, For this reason, I challenge my students by asking them these questions too: to consider what their lives are about, what the legacy is that they will leave behind, and to come face-to-face with the expansiveness of our collective social justice vision that is bounded only by the audacity of our moral imagination. Whether we live up to that challenge is up to each one of us. But our decisions will contribute to the collective shape of the future. As a theological educator, I often wonder whether I teach what I do and teach how I do, not in order to satisfy a curricular goal, but in order to live – to foment the survival of the communities of color to which I belong. Although (as far as I know) my life has not recently been in immediate danger, in this society, any moment can be my final curtain call. In case of the latter possibility, others will have to answer the questions that drive my social justice

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Chasing Normalcy in Abnormal Times

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Being a professor during this pandemic has led me to several Wile E. Coyote moments. Looney Tunes character, Wile E. Coyote makes elaborate plans and employs complicated methods to achieve a singular goal—catching the Road Runner. One running gag involves the coyote falling from a high cliff; the coyote is so preoccupied catching the road runner that he runs off a cliff but doesn't realize it for a moment. He then looks down, realizes that there is no ground beneath him, and falls. That moment that he looks down and sees that there is no ground under him is what I refer to as the Wile E. Coyote moment. He is so busy running and chasing that he does not realize that something fundamental has changed, and he can no longer run in the same way that he did before. Several times while teaching during this time of crisis, I felt like I was trying to run on air, mostly because, I too, was chasing a singular goal—normalcy. With so much turned upside down, it is understandable that we would all want some things to remain unchanged. I realized, though, that the classroom, and the teaching life in general, was not the place I would find normalcy.

At first, I focused on changing my physical classroom course to a virtual classroom, but I did not stop to rethink my course that had been online all semester long –-even though those students were also experiencing a major context change. That's when I realized that I was trying to run on air. When I think ahead to my weeklong concentrated course, still envisioning it as a completely in-person class, I am setting myself up to run on air. When, as collective faculty, we are leery of changes to policy for fear of loosening any standards and worry about precedent that will be set, we are trying to run on air. Wanting a sense of normalcy is very different from pretending that things are normal, or that we can continue to do things the way we have and our new normal will adjust around old rules. Teaching in times of crisis means realizing that in times of crisis, the rules are different. And in prolonged crises, the rules must be made up as we go along. Old ways of thinking no longer serve us—they will leave us running on air.

There was one time when the Coyote caught the Road Runner. But as he was chasing, he did not realize that the Road Runner had gotten much larger. This was no longer the Road Runner that he knew. Nevertheless, he pulled up to the Road Runner with his knife and fork, realized that it was too large to eat, turned to the viewers, and angrily held up a sign to the audience: "Okay, wise guys,–you always wanted me to catch him–now what do I do?" In this time of pandemic, our classrooms, schedules, and overall reality have changed—for us and our students. Approaching this time as though it is normal may just be too big for us to devour right now. There will be a new normal when this crisis is over, but we do not know yet what it will look like, or when it will begin.

So, maybe, we need to stop creating elaborate plans to catch the proverbial road runners professors pursue. We need to stop chasing the fear that our students' education will be diminished if they don't do all the things in the syllabus. Stop chasing our pre-pandemic publishing plan. Stop chasing all of New Year's teaching and professional goals we set only four months ago. Some of us may continue to run, but now in a new direction as we learn our new contexts and work with students on how our learnings help us to respond. Some of us may jog as we relax expectations of our students and ourselves. Some of us may slow to a walk as we journey with students trying to make sense of it all. And sometimes we will need to sit and give ourselves permission to let many of our pre-pandemic plans just, "beep beep," on by.

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Teaching in Plague-Time

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On October 22, 1939, six weeks after World War II had broken out, C. S. Lewis preached to a large crowd of Oxford University students, who were wondering what the point of the academic life might be at that time of international emergency. His address was titled, "Learning in War-Time." My meditation this afternoon will be much shorter than Lewis's great sermon, and to some extent dependent on its content. But in view of my present audience and the current world situation, I'm flipping the focus and the title. I'm calling this, "Teaching in Plague-Time."

Speaking as a teacher, I've been haunted since the coronavirus pandemic broke out by two rather strong fears. Maybe you have, too. I want to say a few words about each of these fears and to encourage us to face and conquer them.

My first fear is that I won't be able to teach effectively this quarter given that I'll be using technologies I haven't yet mastered. I've been feverishly revising my PowerPoints, glumly redesigning my Canvas sites, and fiercely cursing the intricacies of Zoom and Panopto. Countless times I've asked myself, "How can I possibly teach under these restrictive conditions? How will I ever figure out these complicated programs?" As a teacher, I've always been the "sage on the stage," not the "guide by the side," but these days I feel more like the "rube on the tube." I feel silly wearing headphones. I fumble with the Zoom controls. I look at the screen instead of the camera and realize I'm watching myself looking away from myself.

Understandable as this fear of pedagogical failure may be, it springs from a deeper source than shame for my technological ineptitude. It springs from the subconscious assumption that my professorial persona is more important than the intrinsic value of the subject matter I am called to teach, more important than the spiritual and intellectual needs of my students. This is more than wrong. It's sinful. My performance anxiety exposes the vanity that lurks beneath my ineptitude. My conscious fears may subside as my competence improves in coming weeks. But I must repent of my need for my students' admiration. If you're in the same boat, maybe these emergency measures will give you, too, an opportunity for spiritual healing.

My second fear is that the material I will be teaching this quarter will seem wholly irrelevant to my students given that it seems so far removed from the pressing needs of our time. What have the decrees of the Sixth Ecumenical Council to do with the shortage of ventilators and facemasks? Am I doing no more than offering them a brief diversion from the daily news, or feeding their hope that things will soon be back to normal, or contributing my mite to the completion of a credential they need before venturing into the "real world"?

This second fear springs not from my vanity, but from my tendency to forget what Christian higher education is for. Here Lewis's sermon is very helpful. His audience worried that it was unethical to pursue their studies while Hitler was gobbling up Europe. They assumed that the world situation had changed the academic situation. Here's what Lewis told them: "The war creates no absolutely new situation; it simply aggravates the permanent human situation so that we can no longer ignore it. Human life has always been lived on the edge of a precipice. Human culture has always had to exist under the shadow of something infinitely more important than itself. If [people] had postponed the search for knowledge and beauty until they were secure, the search would never have begun. We are mistaken when we compare war with 'normal life.' Life has never been normal."[1]

Was Lewis minimizing or trivializing the dangers and disruptions of the political situation of his day? No. He was remarking on the ontology of human life as such. True, as Heraclitus taught us, "All things are always changing."[2] The only constant is flux. And at the surface level, a great many things were changing in 1939, very suddenly and very alarmingly—just as they are today. But if we view human life through the lens of the Christian gospel, this pandemic "creates no absolutely new situation" for us, any more than war did for Lewis and his students. "It simply aggravates the permanent human situation so that we can no longer ignore it."

Yet the pandemic does create a fresh opportunity for

us to see the real point of what we've been doing all along. It is to engage in, and to invite our students to engage in, "the search for knowledge and beauty." This search is not an irrelevancy or a distraction. It is an end in itself, an intrinsic good. To be sure, current events provide riveting illustrations of timeless principles and new opportunities for the practical application of those principles. We rightly want our teaching to be "relevant" in this time of worldwide pestilence. Yet there is nothing more irrelevant than relevance, if "relevance" is nothing more than a kneejerk reaction to the immediate and the ephemeral.

P. T. Forsyth put it this way: "If within us, we find nothing over us, we succumb to what is around us."[3] As Christian educators, we must take account of what is changing "around" us, lest we fail to respond wisely and creatively. But as Christian educators, we must not forget what is "above" us—the eternally Good, the abidingly True, and the enduringly Beautiful. The quest for the three great transcendentals is the ultimate aim of all higher learning, as mediated through the particularities of our various disciplines. They are the guises in which God becomes manifest "within us," and lifts us from our sins and sufferings. And it is our task and privilege to put our students (and ourselves) into daily contact with them. Thus, it is precisely by doing our workaday job as scholars and teachers, as well as we can, that we bring steadiness, sobriety, wisdom, patience, and courage into the grim urgencies of the hour.

[1] C. S. Lewis, "Learning in War-Time," in The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001), pp. 47-63.
[2] Plato, Cratylus 402A.
[3] Peter Taylor Forsyth, Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907), p. 47.

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Is the Study of Theology Worth It?

Patrick Flanagan
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Is the study of theology worth it? That's a question you and I might pose to our students at the beginning of every semester. At times, we may have to answer this query for ourselves. At the beginning of each semester, I presume this is a question that students have, particularly because at my university students are required to take three theology courses. The first day of theology classes, then, I offer a value proposition. (Now, mind you, I generally teach moral theology classes primarily to business and pharmacy students.) I tell my students that this course may not position them for their ideal job in a corporation or biomedicine, but that a theology course can help students think, write, and speak with a depth and breadth they before had not known. The subsequent question every term is, "but how will that help me advance in my career?" These developed skills, I tell them, will aid them in living out the challenging and, perhaps, painful realities of life. That has never been truer than in these days of Covid-19.

One of the first topics I teach is "narrative." I invite my students to consider what the foundational stories for different religions are. Conversations extend from the metanarratives that undergird traditional monotheistic religions to Rastafarianism, Wicca, and Mormonism. These class days tend to be lively ones as we move into discussions of the Branch Davidians and the Westboro Baptist Church.

Good narratives mature over time as profound experiences impact and challenge them. My parents' generation had Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, the Second Vatican Council, the assassination of John F. Kennedy, and the rise of Fidel Castro's Cuba. Honestly, it made me jealous. I wanted stories to add to my collection but could not imagine having any of such historical impact as they had. How young and naïve I was! GenXers and I have experienced stories that have forced us too to reevaluate the foundational narratives in which we were grounded.

The students in front of me, now on my computer screen, were curious about my generation's stories. Mind you, when I first started teaching, as I suspect all of us are/were, we are/were our students' older sibling. Now, I could be their parents and for that reason, they are curious. When asked, I speak of how marginalized groups and their allies consistently have fought for equality, particularly LGBTQIA+ citizens, communities of color, and immigrants; seemingly endless wars in Viet Nam, the Gulf, Afghanistan, and Iraq; governments, including the United States, having a wide range political scandals; 9/11; and, of course, the information technology revolution. For some reason or another, they are fascinated, and I suspect hungry like I was when I was younger to have their own stories. While some have alluded to the global digital transformation in their lives, there has never been a clear consensus as to what might unite GenZers in a common narrative. Now, there is. They get it.

Students recognize that they must understand the profound effect this global health crisis has had on them, and on their narrative. For those who have been grounded in an understanding of who and what God is for them, they will have additional work that may take them places about they least expected to go. What will be required is what the study of theology provides: some deep thinking, critical writing, and clarity in speaking.

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Theology, Ecology, and Race: Crucial Intersections for Innovative Pedagogy

Tim Van Meter
Methodist Theological School in Ohio

INTRODUCTION

This grant built on previous work in antiracism and ecology through Wabash Center grants and through other areas of support within the institution. The key questions framing this grant arose from Methodist Theological School in Ohio's (MTSO) core commitments to ecological sustainability, justice, and anti-racism, in all their complexities. The first question explored how we might perceive our work more clearly through engaging external consultants to help us address institutional dynamics blocking us from our best pedagogical engagement with our ecological initiatives. The second question explored multiple avenues for more closely weaving our ecological commitments and our work in anti-racism. This second area held four different focus areas for increasing the connections between our key commitments. Through engaging faculty in exploring pedagogical design in relation to commitments to anti-racism and ecological vision, we sought to increase our impact on students through our curriculum, extracurricular programming, and their subsequent impact on leadership in communities served.

Grant Goals

This grant built on earlier conversations encouraging faculty to conceive of their teaching in relationship to our contextual commitments to sustainable justice. We continued to hold the regular faculty conversations started under our earlier small grant. These conversations explored how courses can better reflect a diversity of resources within our respective disciplines. We added targeted readings to expand our understanding of how implicit and null forms of racism as well as ecologically damaging practices were embedded in our pedagogy. In this first year, we also began a series of faculty/staff farm workdays. These days of gathering together to help with the farm, primarily weeding, allowed us to build relationships between faculty, staff, and the farm team. In the first year, we held three workdays and began to see some movement toward a shared commitment to the life of the farm within the overall campus life.

Concurrent with receiving this grant from the Wabash Center, we also received a grant from the Luce Fund for Theological Education to increase ecological literacy in theological schools and religion departments throughout North America. Dr. Tim Van Meter served as grant director for both grants. We held our first large public event in October of 2017, gathering around a hundred colleagues in higher education from more than thirty states, Canada, and Israel to engage how to support ecological literacy within theological schools and religion departments. Our keynote speaker was Dr. Lonnie Thompson, a National Medal of Science laureate and climate scientist at Ohio State University. The event had panels representing multiple religious traditions, scientific perspectives, and racial and ethnic diversity. It was one of the most diverse gatherings held on our campus and held that distinction for over a year.

In late 2017, we submitted an updated budget to reflect how we might refocus this grant in response to the needs of the faculty and the increased external support. The activities in the next section reflect our interrelated initiatives while highlighting those specifically funded through this grant. In addition, at the conclusion of the 2017 spring semester, our Dean was not renewed for a second term. The farm changed from a place that we were learning to hold as important in the life of the school to a place resented by the former Dean and a few senior faculty members. Ecological questions became fraught for many in the school as faculty staked out political positions in relationship to the former Dean. Our activities and goals were initially impacted, but these impacts have faded over time.

Our goals for this grant were intended to spark the imagination of MTSO faculty, administrators, and external colleagues to increase commitments to anti-racist and ecologically sustainable pedagogies and practices. The hoped-for outcomes are still in process.

- We intend to continue modeling what is possible for other theological schools in terms of learning in place. We hope to increase possibilities for network ing to increase sustainable practices in theological education

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- While we understand that historically powerful insti tutions will continue to wake up to the necessity of anti-racist pedagogies embedded in sustainable eco logical visions, we are confident that we will continue to lead in these areas. We have planned and hosted two Seminary Hill Colloquies on anti-racist pedagogies and practices as a founda tion for ecologically sustainable institutions. We will continue in this leadership as a core practice of hos pitality for scholarship in gathering colleagues at MTSO, when public health will allow it.
- Our farm has recently undergone a shift in leadership. The new lead farmer is privileging our educational mission and is committed to extending the farm as a space for learning for local universities and churches and intends to extend our commitment to training beginning farmers.
- Our curriculum has expanded through the work of Dr. Elaine Nogueira-Godsey and Dr. Tim Van Meter. In ad dition, we began a new Master of Arts in Social Jus tice degree which allows students to focus on ecolo gy or other social justice areas.
- Even during the pressures brought by the pandemic, faculty described our core values to include ecological responsibility and anti-racist pedagogy. These are also key commitments brought to the attention of candidates as we hire new faculty.

Clearly, we have had the opportunity through the Wabash grant to open doors that we had not even anticipated at the outset, while attending to the initial purpose of the grant.

Our curriculum continues to disrupt economic and race privileging in light of ecological themes. We have many more opportunities for faculty to be ambassadors to larger communities of theological education, area groups, congregations, and higher education at both undergraduate and graduate levels in secular and religious academic disciplines. We continue to be in a unique position to push forward theological teaching and learning, weaving together ecology, anti-racism, community

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development, anti-poverty work, and health and wellness as interconnected loci for education. We are an institution leading in articulating this tapestry as we deepen key commitments to sustainable justice through pedagogical innovation, partnerships, and curricular content.

Project Activities

Seminary Hill Colloquy
We have held two colloquies exploring ecological commitments and anti-racist pedagogies on the campus of MTSO. Our first Seminary Hill Colloquy (April 2017) explored connections between ecology and racism in the practices of higher education. This initial colloquy was supported through the gift of an individual donor who paid for all expenses. Over the course of three days, seven MTSO faculty members gathered with twenty (or more) colleagues from other institutions to explore unexamined biases within ecological movements in higher education. We had representatives from fifteen different schools, more women than men, and more people of color than white people, all holding space for challenging, trust-filled conversations.

The second colloquy, held in the spring of 2018, was supported through this grant. This colloquy, like its predecessor had over thirty total participants with nineteen (2017) and twenty-three (2018) participating in all aspects of the three-day gatherings. These were not programmed conferences but gatherings of colleagues from MTSO and from external institutions such as Ohio State University, Ohio Northern University, Otterbein University, Texas Christian University, Boston College, Drew Theological School, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, and several others. We intentionally subverted traditional power dynamics by inviting more women than men and more people of color than white people. The conversations were rich, healing, and generating energy for change both internally and externally. These gatherings remain touchstones for many participants and we are hopeful that we can resume these gatherings on at least a biannual schedule after the pandemic. In January 2020, we began to plan for a third colloquy partially supported through unused funds in this grant, but the pandemic changed those plans. The first colloquy was planned by Dr. Van Meter and Dr. Noguera-Godsey and held to a shared leadership model. Dr. Melanie Harris, a participant in the first colloquy, agreed to share in a larger leadership role in the second. She also served as a consultant for the MTSO faculty and led a session focused on pedagogy grounded in eco-womanist hermeneutics.

Student/Alumni Groups

There are two primary outcomes from this line item. The first is a school green team supported primarily through the school budget. The work of this team was begun as part of our Green Seminaries certification and has continued after we completed that process. The team has led initiatives on composting, film viewings, and will host a book club this spring. The second is a group of pastors, the Tuscarawas Urban Action Team, that asked Dr. Van Meter to present on the connections between social justice, ecology, food insecurity, and racism. His initial presentation in spring 2109 resulted in an invitation to meet monthly in a study that engaged these questions as foundational to the work of justice within their vision of ministry. The group met for eighteen months. The grant offset mileage for travel from Delaware to Canton as well as some food for a couple of gatherings. In early meetings, the group explored urban farming and establishing a small food program with young people in their parishes. More recently, the group has begun a fresh market and a free store. This spring, key leaders from this group will break ground on a multi-million-dollar housing project in downtown Canton. Interaction with this group over time has shaped Dr. Van Meter's teaching. He will be exploring how these conversations shaped his pedagogy in an article or two, which are in early draft.
Consultant Visits

Dr. Melanie Harris served as a consultant exploring eco-womanism as a foundational hermeneutic for pedagogical practices. She also provided leadership for the second Seminary Hill Colloquy. Rev. Dr. Heber Brown, III, founder of the Black Church Food Security Network, has also led faculty conversations on pedagogy, racism, and food security. In the spring of 2019, Dr. Randy Woodley led a faculty training on indigenous cosmovision and settler theologies. His leadership continued our challenge to the idea of a Western canon as the measure of theological education and content.

Teaching/Learning Events

We held two major events during the time of the grant, though neither required funding from this grant. The first teaching/learning event was held in the fall of 2017 and was supported through a grant from the Luce Fund for Theological Education. Over seventy-five faculty, administrators, staff, scientists, and religious leaders gathered on MTSO's campus to explore ecological literacy as a core aspect of theological and religious education. The keynote was given by Dr. Lonnie Thompson, climate science professor emeritus of Ohio State University. Paul Myhre of the Wabash Center attended this event and witnessed our work. A second teaching/learning event was held in the spring of 2019 in partnership with the Center for Earth Ethics and the Climate Reality Project. Keynotes were given by former United States Vice President Al Gore and soil scientist Dr. Rattan Lal, professor emeritus of Ohio State University. This event had about a hundred attendees and focused on pastors as frontline teachers on climate change, food insecurity, and the possibilities of regenerative agriculture. We had participants from a wide range of denominations, from Presbyterian Church-USA, United Methodist Church, Quaker, and Mennonite to evangelical and African-American holiness traditions. We also had clergy representing Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and indigenous traditions as participants and session leaders.

Course Integration and Development

After consulting visits from Dr. Melanie Harris in 2018 and Dr. Randy Woodley in 2019, faculty were offered small grants for books and support for rethinking key courses. Several faculty members took that offer and began to rethink core courses in the curriculum using anti-racist and decolonial resources.

Faculty/Farm/Administrative Staff Retreat

We held a couple of short events on anti-racism education for our entire campus. We also had a series of workdays to bridge the divide between faculty and farm. Those who participated found these opportunities be an incredible chance to form new friendships. Faculty who attended these began to explore the farm as a context for teaching.

Adjustment to the New Normal

In the spring of 2020, we still had significant funds available from the original grant and began to plan for a third Seminary Hill colloquy. Then COVID surged again. Our Dean, Dr. Valerie Bridgeman, reached out to Wabash Center Director Lynn Westfield to ask to use these funds to help faculty adjust to our new normal. This request was granted, and the funds were used to support faculty training and a consulting visit on pedagogy with Dr. Charles R. Foster. The Dean found additional funds in her budget to support faculty pedagogical transitions when all funds from the grant were disbursed through small course development grants.

Internal Evaluation

Evaluation is an ongoing process with the work of this grant. Some of the initial progress made on bridging the farm and the faculty through mutual events was actively undercut by a few senior faculty members. The reasons for resistance were never entirely clear, but one significant element was the decision of a few senior faculty members to stand in resistance to anything the President and Dean Bridgeman were in favor of.
Our consulting visits, events, and Seminary Hill Colloquies were strongly positively received. Almost all feedback included praise for our food, our visible commitments to ecological practice, and our strong commitments to anti-racist pedagogies. The evaluative work for internal change is a bit more difficult and has not been completed. We underwent an accreditation evaluation during the course of this grant; it revealed some of the fractures the grant was seeking to address.

Reflection

The grant was an incredibly positive element in the life of the school. The commitment from the Wabash Center allowed us to make multiple initiatives and movements toward a deeper commitment to an anti-racist, ecological vision for theological education. And in all honesty, the most resistant faculty members will be retiring soon or have already. The faculty who will continue to shape this institution are fully committed to these values as essential to our life together and educational mission. We have more and more evidence that we are attracting students by the questions we ask and the commitments we hold. Students are finding us through the ecological and anti-racist vision in our mission. We intend to remain firm in our work to lead in these areas through our pedagogies and our commitment to our place.

Next Steps

We are finding deeper relationships with regional and national partners. We are exploring collaborative possibilities with several regional undergraduate institutions. These include Ohio Wesleyan University, Otterbein University, Denison University, Ohio State University, and Ohio State University at Marion. Our farm and campus are seen as a possible laboratory (post-COVID) for research in food security and the challenges of racism in higher education, ecological movements, and land access. A recent virtual cross-cultural course engaged questions concerning immigration, farm labor, NAFTA, and other elements challenging a just and equitable world. Our students are ready for these discussions and our faculty are ready to lead in these areas. We will continue to take next steps as a progressive, visionary theological school in the Midwest.

Our curriculum continues to disrupt economic and race privileging in light of ecological themes.

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Race- and Gender-Conscious Trauma-Informed Pedagogy

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INTRODUCTION

What does a race- and gender-conscious trauma-informed pedagogy entail for undergraduate students from marginal and minoritized groups in a course on Black and Womanist theologies? Such a race- and gender-conscious trauma-informed pedagogy is grounded in an awareness of the intersectional nature of differentiated experiences of interpersonal and cultural violence and demonstrated through a pedagogical sensitivity that promotes student agency within the context of the learning experience. Foremost, the professor must gain an awareness of how selected course materials and class discussions on whiteness, patriarchy, and violence can prompt the recall of traumatic memories and exacerbate present experience of interpersonal and cultural violence. Second, the professor must demonstrate pedagogical sensitivity that anticipates how course material and activities can be an impediment to the learning experience and adopt student-centered tools that empower students to take an active role in determining how they will engage the potentially disruptive course material.

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES

The fall semester of 2020 was the allotted time for research on trauma-informed pedagogy. I achieved my three goals, which were to conduct a systematic literature review to develop an understanding of trauma-informed pedagogy as a concept and practice, identify best practices for implementing trauma-informed tools for post-secondary learning settings, and develop strategies to minimize potential trauma-related triggers for the most at-risk student group in my context, LGBTQIA students of color. Members of the Wabash Cohort for Teaching Undergraduates who were also working on projects related to trauma-informed pedagogy met on January 15, 2021 to discuss the nature and status of our research. I received helpful feedback on the draft of the literature review and shared with Drs. Ronis and Faithful a couple of resources that I received from Dr. Stephanie Crumpton, one of my conversation partners, earlier in the fall. Our cohort discussion focused on two primary questions: (1) What strategies were we already using that were in alignment with the six principles of trauma-informed pedagogy: safety, trustworthiness, collaboration, choice, empowerment, and resilience, growth, and change? (2) What self-care strategies were we using to help ourselves cope with trauma or traumatic events? Responding to the first question set proved to be the less intensive aspect of the discussion as I came to understand that a vast majority of the resources my literature review evaluated were student-centered and that I needed to prioritize my own self-care and well-being as well. At the beginning of the spring term, I created a faculty checklist as an assessment aid in my course design process. This faculty checklist reflected the six principles of trauma-informed pedagogy and the implementation of three of the best practices that emerged from the literature review. I was, unfortunately, unable to survey students based on these areas because of Institutional Review Board guidelines at the University of San Diego (USD). A survey of this kind required the advance submission of a proposal to engage in a formal research study on trauma-informed pedagogy, which I will explore further at a later date. However, I did utilize the end-of-the-course student evaluations as a resource for assessing the effectiveness of some of the tools utilized, based on student mention and appraisal of the extent to which the tools mentioned were helpful for their learning and grasp of the course material.

CRITICAL REFLECTION

From my conversations with Drs. Ronis, Faithful, and Crumpton, I selected manuscripts and articles of previously published material on trauma-informed pedagogy based on the foci relevant to my research question and teaching context(s) which included race, gender, post-secondary education/undergraduates, and COVID-19. The literature review helped me to do the following throughout the course of my development of a comprehensive understanding of trauma-informed pedagogy as a concept and practice.

I. There Is a Distinction Between Trauma-Informed Pedagogy and the Teaching of Trauma, Itself.

In my experience of teaching Black and Womanist theologies, I have traditionally used texts, films, and assessment tools to introduce students to the historical context out of which both of these modes of critical thought emerged. These texts and films have featured representations of historical traumas of race- and gender-based violence and the impact that these traumas have had on both individuals as well as society. My pedagogical impulse has been to equip students with prior knowledge of cultural history, key concepts in critical race theory, black existentialism, and feminist theory and epistemology. However, a recent experience has prompted me to consider: what are we to do when students are exposed to these traumas, particularly in upper-division courses, without the historical context?

For example, during this academic year I required students to take the Race and Gender Implicit Association Tests offered through the Project Implicit research group as resources for the Social Location Reflection Paper assignment in my Black and Womanist Theologies course. I did not anticipate the adverse effect that the test's use of picture stimuli to measure positive and negative associations between races and animals would have on the effectiveness of the learning exercise. A student who enrolled in the third week of the course missed our earlier class discussion on the history of negative racial stereotyping of Black Americans as animal-like savages within American culture. Without that prior knowledge and sufficient warning, the test contained potentially upsetting graphic associations and the student experienced it as "very disturbing." It was due to this experience of disturbance that the student opted out of utilizing her test results as a resource in her reflection paper. The student's experience of disturbance lessened the effectiveness of the learning experience, but more importantly, I came to understand that due to the lack of sufficient trigger warning and preparedness, her trust in me as the facilitator of her learning experience was diminished as well.

Throughout this project I have come to understand that as a heterosexual black cisgender woman faculty person, I occupy multiple standpoints of privilege and marginalization. One of those areas of privilege is the power I hold as a professor, and it is an abuse of that power to teach the historical traumas of race- and gender-based violence without conducting substantial due diligence to create a learning environment that is supportive of my students' wellbeing as well as my own. I learned that there is a distinction between teaching trauma and teaching with a trauma-informed pedagogy.

II. Best Practice 1: Building Trust in the Classroom Is the Affective and Communal Foundation for Effective Trauma-Informed Pedagogy.

A common theme in the review of published material on trauma-informed pedagogy is the foundational principle of trust. Students need to trust their professors and professors need to be trustworthy in facilitating the learning experience with a sensitivity to the power dynamic. When teaching difficult material that deals with race and gender, I have learned that both whiteness and patriarchy are structural categories that are also deeply tied to identity, whereby critical examination of them can be experienced as a threat to the core of who many of my students understand themselves to be.

Icebreaker Tactic: To mitigate student experience of social isolation and vulnerability, I applied an icebreaker called the "My Name" reflection exercise on how to build a culture of trust and relationality in the classroom. It was suggested by Dr. Pamela E. Barnett from her chapter entitled "Building Trust and Negotiating Conflict When Teaching Race" (2018) in the edited volume Teaching Race: How to Help Students Unmask and Challenge Racism. I changed it slightly to attend to diversity in gender as well.

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"My Name" is an exercise whereby students are read a short text on how names are rich sources for sharing and crafting our own self-narratives inclusive of their meaning, our family histories, race, ethnicity, gender, and "even fantasies of self-definition or transformation" (Barnett 2018, 115). I then ask students to draft their own reflections or relevant stories related to their preferred names. This exercise invites students to eclipse the black-white and male-female gender dichotomies. It is a beautiful opportunity for students to share aspects of their sociocultural backgrounds that include geography, slave ancestry, immigration, and so forth. The exercise invites students to self-name and self-disclose personal information on their own terms. Students are seen, and in my own modeling via participation in the exercise, students see me as a human, as opposed to the idealized role of professor. This was particularly helpful in building community, despite being confined to the virtual Zoom platform. It prepared students for the collaborative learning aspect of the course that will be expounded upon in item number five.

Honoring Student Privacy: My department chair, who also served as one of my conversation partners, Dr. Emily Reimer-Barry, asked me to reflect on how my practice of not requiring students to use the camera feature on Zoom influences my pedagogy. As I learn more about trauma-informed pedagogy I have made efforts to consider more ways in which I can honor student agency and privacy. I have sought to do this by not requiring students to use their video cameras. Many of the students I taught this semester are in different time zones and some are literally in class while their roommates or family members are sleeping. I have found using video to be inappropriate, given that within their homes there is a reasonable expectation for privacy that should be honored despite the present circumstances. Some of my students apologize profusely for their backgrounds, their appearance, and for having to care for their younger siblings or children who "pop up" during class on camera—although it may be a breath of fresh air for the rest of the class to see little children and student families.

Students are concerned about how they look and the suitability of their respective backgrounds. A number of my students have disclosed that they share common spaces within their homes with other family members, roommates, and friends; thus, their preference to have their videos off. Others have communicated that after having their cameras on for extended periods with back-to-back classes, their internet connections become unstable, requiring them to sign on repeatedly during the class session, which is disruptive to them. Therefore, to honor student's security and privacy I do not require video but encourage it "at their comfort levels." Knowing that the learning setting is structured with consideration of their differentiated domestic circumstances helps students feel valued and mitigates the extent to which they negatively experience the utilization of my authority as their professor.

III. Best Practice 2: Teaching on Race- and Gender-Based Violence Requires Consistent and Frequent Trigger Warning.

I was able to address the question I had about the significance of trigger warnings with one of my preselected conversation partners, Dr. Stephanie M. Crumpton of McCormick Theological Seminary. I consulted her article "Trigger Warnings, Covenants of Presence, and More" (2017), and in our debriefing meeting, I learned that including a trigger warning in the course syllabus and providing similar cautions in the first week of class was not enough.

In order to take seriously the power disparity between my students and I and the consequent vulnerability, I quickly adopted a consistent and frequent pattern of communicating trigger warnings when I taught the same course in the following winter and spring semesters. I began by reviewing each week's text and assigned audio/visual material and identifying which materials were potentially triggering, and provided details in the margin (for example, explicit language, nudity, racial-ethnic slurs, physical violence, sexual violence, and so forth).

I revised my syllabus, lectures, and weekly email correspondence to include written and verbal notes two weeks and one week in advance of scheduled engagement of sensitive course material. These provided students with details as to what content would be depicted and imparted students a choice as to how they could engage the potentially triggering material. I learned that this was not a matter of courtesy, but safety, particularly given the prevalence of sexual assault on college campuses and the increase in the number of students who privately disclosed themselves as survivors of interpersonal violence.

Students responded positively to the advance, consistent, and frequent trigger warnings and several spoke openly in class about how the reminders helped them to decide the best times or days during the week to study the material, based on what was going on in their day-to-day lives. I also found a more substantive and in-depth level of introspective as well as empathetic reflection in the Social Location Reflection Paper assignments that were submitted this past spring as compared to those submitted during the immediate past fall term.

IV. Best Practice 3: Providing the "No Thanks to a Discussion" Option is Important for Student Agency, Safety, and Empowerment.

I learned from the aforementioned student experience that if I wanted to be effective in adopting race- and gender-conscious trauma-informed pedagogy, I needed to be serious about cultivating an environment of trustworthiness, where students knew that their well-being would be supported. Trigger warnings given without the provision of student options for how to engage the potentially disturbing material is at best notification and at worst can be experienced by students as false concern. One of the engagement options to offer students is the "no thanks to further discussion" tool that sets parameters for class discussions on difficult material. This option arms students with the right to end their participation in a class discussion on course material by choosing to exit the room (virtually or residentially) as a matter of self-care. Reminding students that they have this option, I have found, is an important student-centered tool to facilitate student agency and promote student empowerment within the context of the learning experience.

I learned that this was not a matter of courtesy, but safety.

V. Best Practice 4: Collaborative Learning Is a Peer-To-Peer Communal Practice that Supports Students in Their Wrestling with

Potentially Triggering Material and Fosters Student Resiliency.

In an effort to address one of my research questions as to the aspects of trauma-informed pedagogy that span beyond the classroom, I found the integration of a collaborative learning exercise to be relevant in this regard. In the third week of the course, students were randomly paired with another classmate with whom they met on asynchronous class days to discuss the readings, the discussion prompt, and to draft reflection posts on the prompt. Students have expressed their appreciation for being paired with other members of the course—"reading partners," with whom they meet sometimes during class, but usually after class during the week. Each partnered group submits a reflection post as a collaborative endeavor. I have found that this collaborative work has increased student comprehension of the material discussed in mini-lectures and readings as well as their confidence in expressing their understanding and critical thoughts on the material, because they have the support of a peer for most of the course.

PROJECTIONS

I plan to complete some of the itemized goals that support my learning and adoption of a race- and gender-conscious trauma-informed pedagogy in the future. For example, I look forward to crafting an USD IRB-approved student survey to assess and evaluate the extent to which the trauma-informed pedagogical practices I adopted were effective. I am most excited about devoting time toward the development of a course-specific virtual workbook to accompany the assigned course texts inclusive of social location exercises, short answer reflection questions, and writing prompts and artistic exercises. Lastly, I will take advantage of the opportunity to consult directly with the Center for Educational Excellence at the University of San Diego, which is our institutional developmental resource for teaching and learning.

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Under Pressure: Teaching Critical Religious Studies

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INTRODUCTION

This reflection shares insights drawn from a learning community funded by the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion that met from 2019-2021. The learning community considered how knowledge is constructed, both in theory and in teaching. The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) offered a practical bridge between the study of religion and student needs because of its focus on effective, equitable ways to design learning for students. Each participant spoke to how the study of religion theorizes about domination, oppression, and control inherent within our discipline, but has not created conversations around teaching the practical import of these theories. As a result, we think against power, but teach with it. The community addressed this disjunction between theory and practice in the classroom.

Presenting Question and Goals

We started with research that shows millennial and post-millennial generations are on track to be the most highly educated generations in US history, and post-millennial students are the most ethnically and racially diverse generation in US history (Pew Research Center 2018). Millennials and post-millennials came, and are coming, of age in a time of boundary and identity contestation. Millennial learners are confident, connected, and open to change (Pew Research Center 2010). While we are thinking of millennial learners, we are already teaching the post-millennial generation. Pew research on millennials affirms that good teaching skills do not significantly change across these generations.

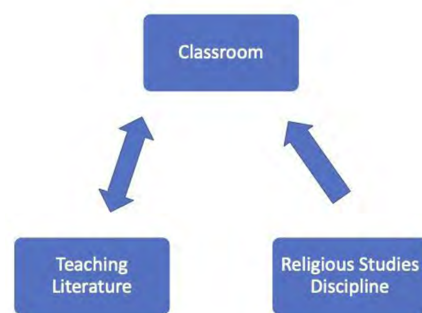

Figure 1: Where We Are Now

We have an opportunity to humanize and enliven our students' understanding of religion. This learning community brought together teachers committed to integrating the needs of our students with critiques of the discipline of religious studies and SoTL. We seek to bridge the gaps between our discipline and our students, our discipline and SoTL research, and our students and SoTL research (Figures 1 and 2). By doing this bridging, we can develop teaching techniques that resonate with our students, reflect the disciplinary critiques of our field, and accord with evidence-based research on teaching and learning.

Many of our students are well suited to understand the fluid, contested, and constructed nature of religions. They intuitively know that religion is not a static category; there is no one "Islam," and there is no one "Buddhism," or one of any religious tradition. They know of the artificiality of geographic boundaries erected between religions, such as Western religions, Eastern religions, and so forth. They understand the role of power, often situated within a patriarchal, heteronormative, racialized environment. While our students may intuitively know this, they still need the religious studies tools to draw out this understanding and use this knowledge that explicitly names what they know.

Despite this need, many scholars of religion continue teaching religion with antiquated methods, even though these methods have long been critiqued within our discipline. Critiques of the scholarship and teaching of religious studies—including but not limited to the world religions paradigm, Christian normativity, Orientalism, colonialism, racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, ableism, and so forth—are saved for advanced seminars. Unfortunately, at that point we have to undo the simplistic understandings of religion with which we programmed our students.

Our core question is how we might integrate our students' need to connect with the people we study—who they are, what they do, and why they do it—with critiques of the discipline of religious studies and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). We seek to bridge the gaps between our discipline and our students, our discipline and SoTL research, and our students and SoTL research. We designed our project to create a collaborative environment where participants could discuss a variety of teaching techniques that resonate with our students, reflect the disciplinary critiques of our field, and accord with evidence-based research on teaching and learning. Our learning community allowed participants to reflect and refine their pedagogical ideas, discuss their classroom techniques, and present their findings to the group. We broke the twelve participants into three small groups in order to have regular and focused engagements where they shared their research, documentation, and classroom practices. Each group examined the framing question: How do we integrate human connections and disciplinary critiques of religious studies into our teaching to improve student learning? Our goals were to:

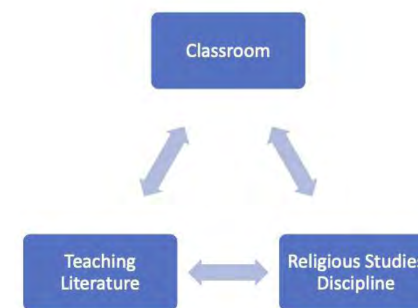

Figure 2: Where We Should Be

1. Map critical issues and disciplinary critiques in the study of religion that impact the ways we teach religion and the ways students learn about religion.
2. Connect the identified disciplinary critiques to scholarship on teaching and learning to determine the most effective class intervention.
3. Craft specific pedagogical practices that integrate human connection, disciplinary critique, and research on teaching and learning.
4. Redesign a syllabus to include newly designed pedagogical practices.

We achieved all four goals:

1. We generated a concept map laying out the critical issues and disciplinary critiques that impact the ways we teach (Figure 3), which demonstrates the interconnectedness of participant concerns, regardless of specialization.
2. We connected disciplinary critiques with effective class interventions through teaching tactics.
3. We crafted pedagogical techniques that integrate human connection, a disciplinary critique, and scholarship on teaching and learning.
4. We redesigned our syllabi to include such new approaches and activities in our classroom.

After gathering participants together, we soon realized that there were obvious gaps in the disciplinary critiques with which we were engaging. No one actively addressed ideas of diaspora and how diasporic identities shape and frame religious thinking and identification. Without consideration of diaspora, we could not adequately address African diasporic religions, nor transnational connections through diasporic flows. Despite the impact of Karen Brown's monumental work Mama Lola (University of California Press, 2010) on many participants, teaching the type of work that she did was absent from our learning community. Relatedly, transnational influences, outside of diasporic connections, were another important area that was absent from our group.

Finally, we also recognized that our approach was focused on the microlevel of teaching tactics, and the way that we might use such tactics to foster human connection, and we did not consider larger issues and challenges, including how we might decolonize our classrooms, our syllabi, and religious studies. Each of us made different power dynamics of the study of religion explicit, exposing various methods of domination and control, but in the future, we would like to address these larger issues within our classes and our field.

Project Activities

We had to adjust our activities because of the COVID-19 global pandemic, and we ended up hosting five two-hour virtual workshops in lieu of an in-person retreat. Despite Zoom fatigue, participants found value in these virtual workshops because they provided the opportunity to share their work and get feedback. They especially liked the modified PechaKucha approach, where they gave two-minute presentations about their pedagogical strategy, disciplinary critique, or review of scholarship on teaching and learning, and they then received two minutes of feedback. In addition, we held optional virtual "coffee shop writing" weekly on Zoom and additional optional meetings in the summer. All activities were designed by the grant coordinators to support the needs of the learning community as we worked together to discuss, create, revise, and complete our project goals.

In a concept map, we mapped critical issues and disciplinary critiques in the study of religion that impact the ways we teach and the ways students learn about religion. In our progress reports, we connected identified disciplinary critiques to scholarship on teaching and learning to determine the most effective class intervention. Within the teaching tactics, we crafted specific pedagogical practices that integrate human connection, disciplinary critique, and research on teaching and learning. Afterwards, we redesigned a syllabus to include our newly designed pedagogical practices.

Internal Evaluation

We surveyed our participants to get feedback and determine the extent to which they found value in the goals and activities of our project. At the beginning of the project period, we sur-

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Figure 3: Concept Map

veyed them about their expectations for the learning community; at the AAR annual meeting, we asked them to evaluate the efficacy of the virtual meetings; and at the conclusion of the project period we had them evaluate their perception of the extent to which we achieved the goals of this learning community.

We received positive feedback about the learning community: participants found that the monthly virtual meetings in the spring helped them make progress on their research and design of their pedagogical practice, they saw fruitful areas of overlap with other participants' pedagogical reflections and design, and they appreciated the sense of comradery and the support of weekly Friday workshops afforded by the learning community (especially given the surrounding circumstances of the pandemic). We accomplished our hoped-for deliverables, namely a concept map, set of teaching tactics, and redesigned syllabi. Perhaps more importantly, we learned about the importance of having learning communities when reflecting on and improving our pedagogical practice.

Feedback from an anonymous exit interview indicated that the learning community not only appreciated the topic, but also the time spent together. When asked if they would participate in a similar project with respect to structure, about 85 percent of respondents said yes they would do so soon, and the remainder said they would, but after some time had passed. In addition, 85 percent of respondents said they would continue to work on the focus of the learning community and participate in more learning communities on this topic. All participants felt supported, by both the community and the conveners, felt that they had clear guidance, and that they benefited from the experience. Specifically, when asked what worked well for them, respondents stated:

The clear timelines and group feedback worked well for me.
Liked the regular check-ins. Lots of flexibility but also intentional focus on each individual during some of our final meetings.
Group meetings, writing Fridays, sharing, and collaborating. Great feedback, good communication from leaders. It was a huge pleasure to be back in a faculty-level academic seminar for the first time in a while. Also, the $2K stipend—yay! I really, really appreciate your honoring the realities of academic labor.This experience was comfort food to me. You all are my people, and this process was a balm in the midst of a crazy time.

The emphasis on material resources was echoed by many participants, who felt that the stipend allowed them to focus on their project. They also appreciated that it was a check-in process rather than a deadline, which enabled them to relax with the group. When individuals altered their timelines, there was a level of transparency and accountability that facilitated mutual support. As a result, people were inclined to create better work than they might have in a typical academic structure. This work happened surprisingly well over Zoom, with respondents offering comments like:

The structure allowed for everyone to check-in and hear questions raised in response. It was really nice to see everyone, and I thought the format of the calls was clear and worked well. Zoom meetings were well organized and collegial. Lots of great collaboration. Great—some of the most engaged, seminar style conversations I've experienced on Zoom. Based on conversations with participants, having organized agendas that everyone was responsible for helped create a sense of commitment and equality in conversations, and it also gave clear direction to the meetings. That structure also generated space for diversion, without those diversions creating a time stressor. The practical result was a more friendly space than a meeting. We also asked participants to share their work via Google Drive, so on calls, people were not describing their work, but receiving and responding to feedback from edits that their peers offered. This created a culture of cooperation rather than competitiveness, and people started integrating new work that arose during discussions into their existing projects.

Reflection

Reflecting on the significance of our project and what we learned about the central question, we found that some participants were contesting substantive concepts of religion: they were drawing students into thinking about religion not in terms of normative assumptions about how practitioners ought to behave or believe, but rather in terms of the diversity and multivalence in how practitioners actually behave and believe, which were sometimes multisensorial, embodied, affective encounters with religious traditions. Several participants were concerned about avoiding re-entrenching Protestant and "pluralism" paradigms of religion by guiding students to detect the constructed-ness of both various scholars' definitions of religion and of students' own redefinitions of religion. They sought to facilitate inquiry into whether other cultural practices may be a form of religion and whether religion is a form of other cultural practices, so as to destabilize common assumptions about how one defines religion.

Some participants were concerned about the ways their students constructed knowledge in their course—their cognitive processes and epistemologies—and focused on disrupting and decolonizing prominent models in the field of religious studies. They surfaced and engaged prior learning to construct new critical and socio-politically situated understandings of religious practices, drawing students into an abolitionist mindset so as to free them from the carcerality of disciplinary thinking and the carceral state itself, or criticizing "bracketing" as a tool for policing what kinds of claims students can make and proposing that we instead encourage complex questioning by our students.

Finally, a third group was more focused on the learning climate in religious studies courses, and how instructors might stage multimodal encounters with course material and holistic interactions with each other so that students construct critical understanding of their relationship with the course material and value the complexity of their fellow learners. This group examined how we might allow grief and loss to be an (swerve-inducing) impetus for learning and not only an obstruction of it, and how we might intentionally become aware of and responsibly shape the emotional labor asked of students in the cognitive tasks of a course.

We also discussed the extent to which we may have to adjust

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our own vision of what we want our students to learn with what they want to learn, and what our institutions want our students to learn—finding the common ground between these (often conflicting) visions (Figure 4).

For example, participants that critiqued the world religions paradigm and wanted to de-essentialize and disrupt dominant concepts of religion often had students (and occasionally institutions) that wanted to the subject to be taught within a world religions paradigm. We learned that trying to bridge disciplinary critiques with our students and SoTL is not a straightforward, simple process, but one that requires us to determine where we might compromise and where we might want to hold our ground.

We also learned that our institutional contexts impact the extent to which we have to make such compromises: while some of the participants teach in departments whose curriculum is no longer wedded to the world religions paradigm, others teach in departments with core courses in "world religions." While the former may be free to adjust their pedagogies to align with disciplinary critiques, the latter must determine how to introduce disciplinary critiques into courses and curricula that are the very target of such critiques. This poses challenges for those who want our students to approach the study of religion in a different way.

Group participants concluded that when critical theory in the study of religion is brought into dialogue with best practices in the SoTL a transformation takes place in the classroom, enriching the student, the instructor, and the academy. Learning community members agreed that work within the classroom (when taken seriously and critically) can destabilize problematic structures, definitions, and institutions that inhibit student success because these are the very things long critiqued within our discipline. It is time we practice what we teach.

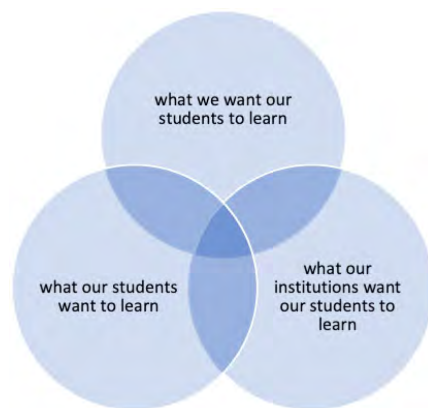

Figure 4: Venn Diagram of Our Goals, Our Students' Goals, and Our Institutions' Goals

Our learning community proposed several ways to practice what we teach. Two main themes stood out. The first theme was that we must adjust the starting point of inquiry in our classrooms, focusing on the first weeks of the class when we set the tone and direction as well as acknowledging power dynamics and disciplinary methods. This approach impacts the entire semester and beyond, informing the place from which our students live, embody, feel, and digest their studies. The second theme challenged us to tackle the primary tensions, assumptions, and misconceptions dominant within the course topic. Participants addressed these challenges by designing courses that scaffold foundational ideas throughout the semester to aid students in their journey to identify, interrogate, relate to, and deconstruct the topic at hand.

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Katherine Zubko, for example, challenged the learning community to see the ways in which belief-centered approaches to the study of religion fall short and demonstrate a Protestant Christian legacy in religious studies. She asserted that a shift is needed toward embodied religious knowledge. Building upon the turn toward the body and affect in religious studies, Zubko structures her introductory religion course around sensory content. She finds that this approach brings students closer to the "how" and "why" of lived religion.

Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand redesigned her introduction to religion syllabus to remove bracketing as an essential starting point. She presented an alternative approach that strengthens students' understanding of lived embodiment by scaffolding academic questioning. In virtual workshop conversations, Gray-Hildenbrand presented a pedagogy of embodied questioning that is informed by feminist disability studies, religious studies, and SoTL. By focusing on developing embodied academic questions in the religious studies classroom, students better understand the experiences they bring to the course material and how they shape the questions about religion which they will find interesting and valuable.

M. Cooper Minister forced us to face the unfolding crisis, threats, and traumas we and our students carry into the classroom and shift our focus towards transformative reflectiveness by making space for affect in the classroom. Minister worked to better include religious affects in her courses, which she argued have been removed from the religious studies classroom by way of bracketing. According to the Minister, this cleansing

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Similarly, Jeremy Posadas challenged project participants to bring pedagogical intentionality and respect to the emotional dimension of learning. Every cognitive task, Posadas explained, is concomitant with an emotional task. He provided detailed examples of this approach in the classroom. He challenged us to both draw upon and elevate ethical and professional standards within our discipline. Posadas presented ten commitments to promote greater emotional agency in the religious studies classroom.

Jill DeTemple focused her work in the learning community on her graduate theory and method seminar, rather than the introductory undergraduate classroom. DeTemple aimed to change the focus and direction of these introductory graduate seminars, which, through rote repetition, have grown as dull as an over-rehearsed patriarchal grad school drama. DeTemple asked if we might do better by challenging our students to think of their relationship to the texts, traditions, histories, and one another as a community of scholars. DeTemple demonstrated how this works in her seminar using various teaching techniques.

Hussein Rashid challenged the practice of using the Five Pillars to teach students about Islam. Rashid presented the ways teaching Islam in this way perpetuates Orientalist depictions of Muslims, flattens the rich diversity of lived Muslim experience, and denies Muslims any sense of agency in their own religion. Students enter our classrooms with incomplete knowledge of Islam, Rashid explained, and educators should work with that incomplete knowledge. Using scholarship on religious literacy and cultural studies, Rashid redesigned his syllabus to include a variety of techniques that ask students to investigate their own assumptions about Islam.

Beverley McGuire pushed participants to tackle theoretical critiques of consumption and commercialization of Asian religious practices in introductory religion courses. Using data collected from her own courses, McGuire demonstrated the need to address prior knowledge and misconceptions about Asian religions. McGuire found that having students engage in personal reflection and analyze their participation in the consumption of religion, such as through yoga classes and meditation apps, improved their critical thinking abilities.

Martha Smith Roberts problematized the ways pluralism informs the assumptions, forms, and content of American religion courses. Roberts demonstrated the underlying neoliberal humanistic, white supremacist, and Protestant hegemonic bases of the unexamined pluralism narrative. She wants to teach students about pluralism rather than teach students to be pluralists. She redesigned her American religious history syllabus as a course centered on narrative and myth making, providing students with the understanding that history is contested, constructed, and dependent upon the narrator.

Henry Goldschmidt examined the dilemma of how one teaches critical religious studies in the public sphere outside of academia. In developing religious diversity education programs with the Interfaith Center of New York, he grapples with the same types of tensions we do in our college classrooms. He has to negotiate students' expectations for fixed and easy definitions of religion and religious groups and what we know to be the reality of the diversity within and among religious communities. To address this concern, Goldschmidt balances religious studies critiques of the world religions paradigm with contextualized empathetic understanding of lived, local religious experiences.

Benjamin Zeller identified the challenges instructors face when students enter the classroom with certain assumptions about what constitutes religion and science. Problematizing these definitions brings to the surface longstanding disciplinary critiques about the influence of colonialism, sexism, racism, and elitism on both science and the study of religion. Zeller argued that it may be easier to ignore students' underlying assumptions, but it is bad pedagogy. He redesigned his syllabus using a pedagogy of teaching controversial topics. He did this by carefully curating the material to provide alternative narratives that disrupt commonly held assumptions about the relationship between science and religion.

Annie Blazer acknowledged the struggles students encounter facing the multiple definitions of religion within the study of religion. This multiplicity can be confusing, but she asserted it is necessary to present essential theoretical approaches because definitions are arguments. Blazer presented an avenue to ad-

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dress this complexity by way of something familiar—a redesign of religion and sport.

Joseph Tucker Edmonds presented the ways the university classroom is a carceral space and asked what it would look like to transform the classroom into a democratically engaged space. He proposed a shift to explore religious studies through the pedagogical intervention of abolition. Tucker Edmonds redesigned his course with abolition and the recognition that spaces of higher education have not been liberating for all people. In Tucker Edmonds's course, the very logic of the university—its surveillance, discipline, and control—is critically examined for the common good. Once this work has been addressed, then the work of religious studies in the classroom is pursued.

Conclusion

In our work, the learning community drew on critical, engaged, and transformative pedagogy such as that of bell hooks, Paolo Freire, Henry Giroux, and others who adopted a collaborative approach to learning, where students and instructors cocreate and construct knowledge together (DeTemple, McGuire, Minister, Roberts, Tucker Edmonds, Zubko). Recognizing that our embodied selves are structured by inequality, we also drew attention to the power effects of knowledge (Goldschmidt, Gray-Hildenbrand, McGuire, Tucker Edmonds), and the way we might "reduce the carcerality" of our classroom and teaching (Tucker Edmonds). This encouraged us to be vulnerable and receptive alongside our students (McGuire, Minister, Tucker Edmonds). We incorporated Reflective Structured Dialogues into our classes, which created spaces for deep listening and speaking, built trust, allowed for vulnerability and risk, and encouraged personal and intellectual growth (DeTemple, Gray-Hildenbrand, Minister). When working with community partners, we adopted a public, civically engaged approach that fostered an empathetic understanding of other people's religious lives by having religious leaders tell stories about the role of faith in their personal, professional, and social activist lives (Goldschmidt).

We made space for affect, emotions, and feeling in our classes (Gray-Hildenbrand, Minister, Posadas, Zubko). Instead of prioritizing the cognitive over the affective dimension, we accommodated and named the emotions that arise within the classroom (Minister). Building on the scholarship of embodied learning and sensory education, we encouraged our students to use their sense of smell, taste, hearing, and touch as a lens for understanding religious experience (Zubko). Drawing on the work of feminist and disability scholars, we had our students "practice interdependency" in the classroom, helping each other learn in more accessible, clear, and relatable ways (Gray-Hildenbrand).

The addition of time to our initial Wabash grant period because of COVID-19 allowed us to think of a larger project and consider dissemination of our findings. The result is the edited volume, Teaching Critical Religious Studies: Pedagogy and Critique in the Classroom on Bloomsbury Academic Press (Gray-Hildenbrand, McGuire, and Hussein Rashid 2022). In addition to ongoing panel presentations at various guild meetings, several participants are maintaining their "virtual coffee" writing sessions.

We need to move from a situation of being under pressure to experiencing a Bohemian rhapsody.

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Annie Blazer is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. Her courses cover religion in America from the colonial to contemporary period. In particular, her courses investigate the relationships between religions and American culture, paying attention to race, class, gender, and sexuality. Professor Blazer's first book was Playing for God: Evangelical Women and the Unintended Consequences of Sports Ministry (2015). The book is an ethnographic exploration of the religious experiences of Christian athletes in the US.

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Henry Goldschmidt is Director of Programs at The Interfaith Center of New York, where he develops programs for religious and civic leaders, K-12 teachers and students, social workers, police, and other audiences. He also works as a cultural anthropologist, community educator, interfaith organizer, and scholar of religion. Henry received his PhD in anthropology from the University of California at Santa Cruz and has taught religious studies and anthropology at Wesleyan University and elsewhere. He is the author of Race and Religion among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights (2006), and other publications on American religious diversity and religious studies pedagogy.

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Searching for Christian Religious Education: Embodying the Field

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What is at the heart of Christian religious education? Through a content analysis of syllabi for introductory classes, this project searches for what holds the field together. The congregation as setting for learning and the praxis of teaching/learning are the primary foci found in all syllabi. Yet, the field is more. Additional concerns arising after the emergence of the pandemics of COVID-19 and racism in 2020 plus other strands in the syllabi offer a bigger picture. The paper ends with a proposal and questions about the contributions of the field.

KEYWORDS

Christian education, syllabi, teaching practices, culture, and context.

Problem

"The structures that have organized Christian religious education for the last hundred years are no longer effective. We cannot continue to replicate the practices of the past." These wise words paraphrase how one professor of Christian religious education begins a syllabus for an introductory course. Those of us in the field know the words are true. Indeed, the past visions and practices of Christian education must change—yet, from what, to what?

The paraphrase poses questions that many of us have been asking about the commitments and practices that we teach in Christian education. Furthermore, they connect us to larger questions of how the field contributes to faith communities, public life, and the wider global, interfaith field of religious education. This article seeks to offer some answers drawn directly from teaching in the field. It offers a case study of Christian religious education in the US.

Profound religious changes are occurring in the US. The most recent poll of religious life in the US noted that for the first time the number of people actively involved in any regular religious practice has fallen below 50 %(Jones 2021). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound effect on the budgets of theological schools and church-related colleges and universities. Fewer jobs are available in religious studies. Several denominational colleges are dropping academic departments, including religion. And the way the adjective "Christian" tends to be used in the media misses the wider religious and political diversity of Christian communities.

The formal field of Christian religious education (CRE) was born during a period of religious expansion and developing professions. The Religious Education Association (REA) was also organized at that time—in 1903. Sunday schools were expanding as were large teacher training programs. Denominational and interdenominational agencies supporting education were thriving. Catholic parochial school programs were healthy and growing. Preparing teachers for schools, directors of education for parishes, youth and children's workers for congregations and neighborhoods, church and community workers for community projects, local directors of councils of churches, and pastors fueled the hope that CRE could affect public living. Seminaries and colleges expanded their degrees in religious education and hired faculty in "Christian education or religious education." By the late 1920s, some theological seminaries even reported that their largest student populations were preparing to be educators.

While the Great Depression and WWII put much of the expansion on hold for a time, church attendance increased after the war through the 1960s. CRE saw a resulting resurgence with the expansion of curriculum publishing and denominational agencies dedicated to educational ministries, including the National Council of Churches ecumenical Cooperative Curriculum Project. Professional groups for Christian religious educators were founded or expanded in the late 1960s and 1970s. Protestants and Catholics joined together in academic societies for the study of education. Of course, the theories that fueled our work were developing and changing, yet the future of the church looked secure. CRE was expanding!

In contrast, the last 40 years have been a time of decline. Less church participation, the shrinking of denominational staffs, fewer local church Christian educators, and less vitality in professional organizations has raised questions about the field and its future. No wonder we hear: "The structures of CRE are no longer effective." Yet, educating people of faith, enhancing inter-religious communication and learning, and contributing to public dialogue are as greatly needed in the present as they were at any time in the past.

Project

This project is one effort to search for the field of Christian religious education. There are many ways to address questions about our field. We could review denominational data, examine curriculum options, or assess congregational practices. We could explore themes in key monographs, examine articles in professional and academic journals, or interview a sample of faculty who teach Christian education. All would be valid efforts. However, this project seeks to explore what is at the heart of CRE by examining what scholars who teach and write in the field actually teach their students.

As we have sought to redefine our field, we have drawn on theology, education, social sciences, and cultural studies. Many of us have written books identifying important themes. We have examined approaches, contexts, and commitments. Yet, the fact is that what we teach in our classes and what we ask of our students is how we embody our field— the values that represent us. Our classes reveal what we practice.

This empirical study thus reports the commitments reflected in our courses and the practices we expect from our students. Years ago, Chris Argyris and Donald Schön helped us understand the differences between espoused theories and theories-in-use. An espoused theory attends to what we explicitly say we believe. A theory-in-use is what we in fact engage in our practices. This project therefore reviewed syllabi for basic courses in Christian religious education taught in theological seminaries, colleges, and universities to uncover the clusters of theories-in-use in our teaching.

To provide a hint of the findings, despite differences, we share a field of study. We use a set of texts, we repeat many themes, and our pedagogies facilitate, confront, and create spaces of learning for people and communities. Our syllabi are excellent exercises in teaching and learning. We share much, yet we also embody important differences, and we need to do more in our introductory classes. After clarifying the method of study, the analysis of this paper proceeds from a description of themes shared by the syllabi, to raising questions about the differences using additional themes running through some syllabi and the impact of the 2020 pandemics of health and racism, and finally makes a proposal and suggestions for future work.

Method

The project consists of a content analysis of over 60 introductory syllabi for courses in CRE taught by Catholic, mainline Protestant, evangelical, and independent Christian scholars. In the summer of 2019, I invited several colleagues who are active in REA to participate and to recommend additional colleagues who attend other professional academic societies. In my invitation, I described the project, requested the submission of a syllabus and a description of CRE requirements at the school, asked permission for the participation of their syllabus in the analysis, and promised to send results.

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Initially I received over 70 syllabi. Some were for foundation courses for PhD students. Most were from theological seminaries, yet several were from graduate programs in religion or religious education/ Christian education. Most of the schools offered an MDiv degree, yet others also had MA, MTS, or MRE/ MCE degrees. Of the theological seminaries offering an MDiv, some required a basic CRE course, others provided a set of courses to fulfill a CRE requirement, and still others saw CRE as an option in a group of courses fulfilling ministry requirements. I eventually included 61 syllabi in the study that explicitly fulfilled a foundational requirement. Some of the syllabi were taught face-to-face; some were hybrid courses using both face-to-face and online components; and others were online courses taught in synchronous or asynchronous formats.

As I reviewed the syllabi, I sought to discover the theories-in-use embodied in them. Reading through all the syllabi, I took notes on each attending to the following:

(1) class goals,
(2) texts and resources required,
(3) learning expectations for students, and
(4) settings and contexts of CRE that were assumed—congregation, school, neighborhood, wider public.

Secondly, using a data file, I listed course titles. Third, as an ethnographer, I read and read until themes and questions emerged for me. I identified themes shared across the syllabi and additional "minority" themes running consistently through some of the other syllabi.

While I read the syllabi, the pandemics of COVID-19 and racism focused the efforts of our society. I then returned to a sample of those who submitted syllabi asking how these two pandemics had affected their classes and teaching. I received a significant number of responses and followed up with conversations with several. This new data significantly shifted my research. It highlighted some of the additional themes running through some of the classes.

Finally, I reviewed the data and organized the findings. As you are all aware, in any ethnographic study the personal lenses of the scholar affect what is seen. Look for the effect of my lenses as you read. I am a member of a mainline Protestant, overwhelmingly white denomination that is in the midst of crisis and division. While I am aware of the impact of culture and difference, I also have received the benefits and the blindness of white privilege. I have a set of perspectives on CRE: that it is a theological activity connected to the ongoing shaping of a theological heritage, the future of the faith, and the contribution of faith to wider public dialogue. I also seek to engage and learn from interfaith scholars of religious education.

A significant limitation of this method must be mentioned. All the content or practices of CRE cannot be taught in an introductory class. Limits of time, background, and experience affect these classes. While I know we consider much more to be part of the field than what we address in basic courses, the insights from syllabi do reflect what we think is crucial for our students to learn. They provide an embodied definition of CRE.

Course Titles

As mentioned, I used only those CRE courses that were used to meet foundational requirements. Of the 61 syllabi reviewed, they had 51 different titles: for example, Educating in Faith, Learning Environments in Congregations, Teaching and Learning in the Church, Educating for Discipleship, and Critical Religious Pedagogy, to name a few.
While the differences seem to denote a lack of clarity in the field, attending to content reveals four foci:

- Introduction to CE/RE,
- Teaching and Learning in the Church,
- Congregational Learning, and
- Discipleship and Formation.

A Shared Consensus
Three themes are shared through almost all the courses: the congregation as setting for learning (for education, formation, or discipleship); teaching and learning; and foundations for CRE. These three are clearly the major expressions of the field. Later I will share the additional threads running through several of the syllabi.

Let us examine each of the major threads.

Congregation as the Primary Setting for CRE
Many of us who have written about the history of CRE have suggested that in the late 1960s, the era of "church education" was born (in contrast to previous eras of Sunday school, religious education, or Christian education) (see Boys 2001; Seymour, Foster, and O'Gorman 1984). Reading the syllabi, we are clearly still in this church education era. The differences in focus of these courses and those at the beginning of the twentieth century is significant. The earlier classes attended to schooling, religious schooling, public schools, and public education. The recent ones focus almost exclusively on the congregation.

Over 60 percent of the classes require an assessment of a congregation and/or a plan for engaging it educationally. While many reflect an anxiety about whether congregations are vital, they proclaim that the congregation is the predominant setting for Christian education. Some classes point students to particular congregations they believe are faithful and making a difference. Others provide an analysis about how congregations are shaped in today's cultural situation. Many look at education within these congregations through the lenses of educational events, worship, spiritual formation, discipleship practices, social action, or mission.

Assuming Christian education occurs primarily within congregations, these classes seek to form students, pastors, and educators who analyze ministry contexts, define goals for mission and ministry, and engage in practices that teach and send congregants into ministry.

Teaching and Learning

Almost two-thirds of the basic classes focus on teaching students the practices of teaching and learning. Teaching settings include classes, retreats, educational events, youth ministry, and mission outreach. In their content, these classes explore theological reflection, spiritual formation, and learning theories as well as teaching practices.

All require the development of lesson plans (some with extensive attention to how), analysis of learning contexts (addressed in depth), definition of the students to be taught and their cultural backgrounds, and the practicing of teaching by oneself or with a small group—from micro-teaching to as many as four practice teaching assignments. The courses draw on a wide variety of resources to show the diversity of personal and cultural learning patterns and the depth of the faith as well as its commitment to personal and social change. For these courses, CRE prepares pastors, teachers, leaders, and ministers who teach to make a difference.

Foundations of Christian Education

Almost all the courses name "learning biblical, theological, and educational foundations of Christian religious education" as a goal. Yet, across the courses, what is meant by "foundation" varies.

Of course, many books were recommended throughout the 61 classes (over 150), but I was surprised to see a core group of approximately 20 CRE monographs appear on many syllabi. They honor the diversity of our field, embodying differences of gender, race, and culture. In addition, except for three or four, these books are recommended across Protestant mainline, evangelical, and Catholic classes. Clearly, key books written by CRE scholars are taught across the field. Scholars in the field read and learn from each other's work.

Interestingly, most of the resources used from outside CRE focus on theology (e.g., African American, liberation, or Barthian, to name a few), practical theology, or denominational (e.g., Wesleyan or Catholic) foundations. While biblical foundations are mentioned, they receive little attention in most of the classes (except for Brueggemann's Creative Word, originally published by Fortress in 1982).

Furthermore, books and resources from educational theory or educational policy are rare. Except for Freire, hooks, multiple intelligences theory, and an occasional book on development or formation in a particular cultural context, educational literature is absent.

What Holds the Field Together

In these syllabi, two themes are embodied in teaching:

(1) the congregation as setting for learning and
(2) the praxis of teaching and learning.

Without a doubt, these two are central to the work of the field. The great majority of classes, even electives, often deal with both themes, such as a class on youth ministry or teaching for social change.

Yet, to move from description to inquiry, simply defining the field by these major themes misses profound questions included in the syllabi—questions running through several of the syllabi about the purposes of the field, how culture and community affect the formation of identity, and how our field makes a difference in the witness and mission of the Christian faith in the wider world. To these we turn.

The Challenge of the Pandemics
As mentioned, in late summer 2020, I wrote to a sample of the persons who had submitted syllabi. I asked them if and how their classes had changed because of the pandemics of health and racism. That sample cut across denominational divides. Several persons responded, many enthusiastically. I connected with fourteen by email and conversation.

We all know that the COVID-19 pandemic forced all courses online. Some were synchronous meeting in real time by Zoom, most were hybrid, and some were asynchronous. A surprising result of this change was that students were drawn together from across the world. One colleague described a fall 2020 class—students from six US states, two from Europe, three from Africa, and two from Asia. While negotiating the time differences was difficult, the breadth of conversation was amazing.

The bigger question, though, is how both pandemics affected the content of classes. Many colleagues mentioned the gaps that were revealed in their teaching. Many suggested that as a field we need much more attention paid to the power of culture to shape learning.

First, some educators said the public conversation about health, racism, and economic disparities simply reinforced what already focused their classes. They felt more support from their colleagues, yet wondered why it had taken their colleagues so long to see this expanded focus for the field. Many of these persons were faculty of color.

Second, other educators shared that they had begun to address the white-centric realities of their denominations, even when denominations had numbers of persons of color within them. Many of these educators were white. Several admitted that prior to Black Lives Matter, they had dealt little in their classes with their own white supremacy and that of their denominations. They profoundly shifted the content in classes. They intentionally included antiracist practices. Bibliographies were expanded to attend to cultural realities, including the history and experiences of churches of color, and an examination of the impact of culture on churches.

Thirdly, educators enlarged the scope of congregational analysis projects to include the communities surrounding the congregations. They also expanded options for teaching projects,

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encouraging more attention to the contexts and communities in which students minister. Some expanded teaching to include advocacy and transformative ministry projects.

These changes suggest that simply attending to congregations and to teaching practices is not a sufficient focus for the field of CRE. Honestly, profound questions are being raised about what is missing.

Additional Emphases for the Field

What is missing? The changes in syllabi in response to the pandemics as well as the minority threads of emphasis running through many of the basic syllabi confront the field with questions. Six clusters emerged:

- how the wider culture shapes learning,
- identity and ethnicity,
- contexts for teaching,
- professions for which we prepare our students,
- drawing on the field of education, and
- the purposes of Christian religious education.

How the Wider Culture Shapes Learning
How the wider culture shapes learning connects with and highlights the responses to the pandemic. Colleagues' comments were profound. To quote two of them: "I was convicted." Another said: "I saw what I had missed before. I believe that we desperately need to deal with how culture 'teaches' and how our teaching hopes to address the wider culture."

We all know that culture and context are profoundly educational. No matter how hard we seek to form disciples in Christian practices, cultural messages powerfully shape all of us—from our rising to our sleeping. We can learn much from colleagues in other faith communities who state that their faith practices have been significantly affected by the power of "American" culture. For example, a Japanese Buddhist community in Chicago even has a Sunday school and meets for worship on Sunday.

The impact of our field is limited when we do not explicitly engage how wider cultural realities shape learning. Purchasing clothing, watching television, responding to social media, paying taxes, and investing for retirement are practices that profoundly teach us who we are, what we believe, and for what we live.
In Jesus's day, Roman oppression affected Jewish identity and formation. It fueled many of the conflicts about faithfulness. Even with regular rituals of remembrance and identity, addressing Roman culture divided the people. The same is true today. Many of our mainline denominations were formed in the atmosphere of white supremacy. The definitions of the "good" in our culture are profoundly shaped by a consumerist identity. Who gets public airtime reinforces white cultural realities. How the identities of both churches and believers are shaped must be a central issue for faithful Christian religious education. The fact is we are both Christians and residents of our communities.

Identity and Ethnicity

It was a surprise that so few of the classes addressed identity formation. Twenty-five years ago, a CE syllabus would have had to address how the person is formed. Faith development and moral development were explored across classes. In fact, the REA 2021 conference highlighted again the importance of identity formation in its program focusing on "Gender, Sexuality, and Wholeness: Religious Education for Confrontation and Healing" (REA 2021). Yet, our classes focus more on how and where we teach, rather than on who we teach and how people are formed as human beings in ethnic, cultural, and public contexts.

The classes that explicitly addressed identity either attended to a denominational identity (e.g., Wesleyan or Roman Catholic) or to an ethnic or cultural identity (HBCU seminaries explicitly demonstrated clear commitments to empower black leaders and black communities). Cultural and ethnic identities are powerful, as is the prevailing white supremacist context of US religion. Who the field empowers students to teach and how we address culture and ethnicity in our classes are important issues.

Contexts for Education

Since the congregation is primary setting for learning, many classes spend considerable time looking at worship, ritual practices, and events. Some expand to congregational development, seeking to help students lead in revitalization. Others challenge traditional congregations by exploring emergent forms of church.

In addition to church, several of the classes mention other contexts for learning: public schools, private schools, home schools, freedom schools, nonprofit agencies, new ministries (e.g., internet), and the media. Some colleagues expand classes by encouraging students to develop action projects or transformative ministry projects. How do we help our students consider the expansive varieties of learning opportunities for faith?

Professions

A few courses specifically focused on the minister as educator. Some syllabi also had class assignments for directors of education or youth ministers. Others used panels, visits, and ethnographic assignments to help students see community organizers and nonprofit leaders as educators. At one time, the professions our students would serve in was clear—they would be pastors, educators, church and community workers, and teachers. Are these the primary professions for our students today?

In addition, some of the syllabi acknowledged that many students, even in seminaries, are not preparing for church vocations. In many seminaries, less than 30 percent are preparing for a church vocation. Students come with a desire to learn about religious faith and its impact. They hope that their study will enrich whatever work they do. Recognizing the diversity of student goals, several colleagues provided alternative assignments such as journal, portfolio, or creative projects, so students develop skills that inspire learning in many contexts. Do we need to give more consideration to the relationship between our courses and where students will work?

Disciplines of Educational Policy Studies

As mentioned, theological perspectives serve as foundations for CRE in many syllabi. Some are organized around a theologian or school of theology. For example, several from the "Methodist family" discuss the Wesleyan view of sanctification and "means of grace" as approaches to education. Some syllabi at Roman Catholic schools turned to major theological documents.
Yet few scholars used resources from education. Backwards design, learning theories, Freire, hooks, media, and multiple intelligence are the sources some draw on. In contrast, REA represents a long history of engagement with the philosophy of education and cultural studies. What do we have to learn from educational theory? Much of the conversation about the impact of culture on identity formation and learning is occurring in schools of education. Our conversations about race, culture, and context could be enhanced by our interactions with these scholars of education. Indeed, I wonder how many in REA also attend the American Educational Research Association. At AERA, there is an active group focused on religion and education. We need to explore more links to education.

Purpose of CRE

Many of the syllabi stated a definitive purpose for CRE; for example, discipleship or transformation. Several others explored alternatives. Most also required students to complete a paper to define their own "stance" (or, even better, a manifesto, pedagogic creed, or "So what! letter").

Yet, as we all would suspect, answers about purpose that colleagues provided differed. To name a few, the task of CRE is: discipleship, forming "Christians," the realm of God, living a way of life, inspiring faithful congregations, following Jesus, liberation, or transforming persons and communities. What other emphases do we profess? After reading the syllabi, I am convinced we should name in our syllabi the purposes that guide our work. In fact, we should write a "So what!" letter for our students and colleagues. Why do we do this work? What vision inspires us? The conversation it would inspire would be lively!

The Heart of the Field: A Proposal

After exploring the syllabi, considering major and minor themes that run through them, and seeing the impact of the pandemics on teaching and learning, I move from description to prescription. I invite you to make the same effort. What is missed? How do the concerns emerging at the edges of our field challenge embedded traditions that are repeated over and over? What do we need to do for our field to "hold space for those in need, discuss topics with human wholeness in mind, and share healing?" (REA 2021). I offer the five themes that emerged out of the analysis as the "heart of the field." I then raise concerns about next steps that need to be engaged for the faithfulness and vitality of the field.

The Heart of the Field of Christian Religious Education
Five themes are currently at the heart of our field.

1. **The congregation as the primary context for religious learning is at the heart of the field.** Honestly this theme occurs in every syllabus. In current US culture, congregations are the most explicit place of Christian religious learning. Of course, Christian schools, home school curricula, and community action agencies exist and teach, yet the classes focus on how the aspects of congregational life from preaching to service to liturgy to community building are the key places of learning the faith.

2. **Teaching students the practices of teaching and learning is at the heart of the field.** Many of the classes do an outstanding job of helping students learn to prepare a teaching and learning plan. They are sensitive to environment, to students, to content, to learning goals, to various practices of learning, and to evaluation. They are excellent courses in teaching and learning. Most focus on learning in congregational educational contexts, but many offer tools that can be used in many settings. Each of the classes also wrestles with the purposes of teaching: formation, learning content, learning practices of faithful living, or transformation.

3. **How identity and "Christian" faithful identity is formed is at the heart of our field.** We know that culture shapes learning. We worry about the power of the wider culture to control and shift all our teaching. We know that identity is formed by race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. Many faculty explicitly attend to "addressing" (whether that means challenging, revealing, or learning from) the power of the wider culture.

4. **Expanding our awareness of the contexts for teaching and learning the faith is at the heart of our field.** Clearly congregations are the most obvious place for learning. Yet others are exploring the impact of the faith on the content and struc-

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tures of schooling: some by redoubling efforts to engage public education (both the content taught and the religious learning that occurs there) and others alternatively focus on faith-based schooling as a more controlled place where faith can be learned. This concern for context raises questions about how our field explores the many places for religious teaching. While many of us focus on preparing pastors as educators, what role can we have in shaping schoolteachers, preschool teachers, curators of social and online media, social activists, and community educators? For example, in the late 1940s, The Eternal Light radio program was sponsored by Jewish Theological Seminary to educate the public about Judaism. It moved to television in 1952 and joined Life is Worth Living with Bishop Sheen and Frontiers in Faith by the National Council of Churches. A parallel today is On Being or a set of podcasts. How do we help students become part of this wider network of religious education?

5. **Defining the foundations of Christian religious education is at the heart of our field.** Clearly the primary embedded theory-in-use is theology, but what theology or what theologies? We span the globe with our interpretations of the faith. Moreover, many ask how practical theological methods shape the definitions of our field? On a much more limited scale, we turn to the disciplines of hermeneutics, educational policy studies, and human development to shape our field. I am convinced we need a conversation about the foundations we turn to as resources for the field. We do this not because we want to force unity, but so we can share the rich diversity of ways that faith can and should impact living.

In summary, what are commitments and practices that hold the field of CRE together? Where do we hope to make an impact on our schools, our students, and our world? I suggest that there are five concerns that define the heart of the field:

1. We focus on the congregation as a primary setting for learning.
2. We attend to the practices of teaching and learning.
3. We inquire about the roles of the wider culture and social and ethnic contexts on learning and identity formation.
4. We are aware that we need to expand our attention to the variety of contexts for religious learning.
5. We struggle to define the foundations for CRE.

Next Steps

I would not be surprised that many of us could have named the themes and questions giving our field energy and vitality. I also want to acknowledge again that an introductory course is simply that—introductory. We cannot and do not include the whole field in it. Nevertheless, the syllabi I reviewed do highlight what we consider important. As we honor these five themes that define the field, what more do we need to explore? What stands at the margins of our field and is inviting us to respond and be faithful? Let me suggest four:

1. **Culture, context, and race. The question at the center of our field is:** How is Christian identity formed and what difference does it make for persons and communities? We make efforts to understand identity. Our desire to make a difference is expressed. Yet, the power of culture to shape (or misshape) identity and control education is extraordinary. The white supremacy and consumer capitalism that fuel how the public is formed are overwhelming. They provide the backdrop for all patterns of education. They fuel much of what is brought into and comes out of our churches. Is our attention to congregations as primary sites of learning (even Christ-against-culture patterns of formation and resistance) sufficient to address these embedded realities taught every time we shop, invest, watch television, or leave home? I think not! Furthermore, while efforts to honor diversity are spoken in our churches, seemingly little real effort goes into acts of reparations (penance and acts of justice). We cannot answer the question of identity by focusing exclusively on Christian religious education. While theology and ethics assist us with this reflection, education and educational policy studies are the primary places where issues of the power of culture and racism are being addressed. Our colleagues in education are engaging how education can assist us to live in an increasingly diverse society and how racism and aggression/micro-aggressions affect learning. Our field used to have a robust conversation with our colleagues in education. It is time we restore attention to the work being done in education on race, culture, and learning.

2. **Enhanced conversations across religious communities. Some of our syllabi attend to what we learn from the other great religious traditions and suggest ways to empower interfaith education, yet those are few.** To continue the conversation about culture, formation, and race, our Jewish and Muslim colleagues have described the power of North American identity to reshape their religious practices and traditions. We are all victims of the power of "American" culture to shape identity and to direct public conversation. We believe that our great religious traditions can contribute to public dialogue, yet we live in a culture where forces are seeking to break any attention to and advancement of the "common good" (for example, see Strauss 2021; Peluso-Verdend 2021). Enhanced attention is needed in our field to engaging in interfaith conversations about education, formation, and public life. We must learn together.

3. **Attention to the work of our students. For what professions are we preparing our students?** Most of our courses are focused on church vocations, yet increasingly we know that fewer and fewer of our students will be employed by churches. More and more of our students are seeking careers in public, nonprofit, and advocacy service. How does our conversation in the field empower this broader network of persons who are leading religious education? What is our role in engaging public, charter, home, and Christian schools? How can we offer educational skills to those working in programs of social justice and social work? Furthermore, how are we assisting in the creation of these new avenues and vocations for CRE?

4. **The purpose of CRE. As was said above, significant differences are expressed in our syllabi about the purposes of CRE.** We mention Christian identity, faith formation, discipleship, following the Way of Jesus, enabling the realm of God, and transformation of persons and communities. I believe there are alternative purposes that can lead and probably together should lead our field. Considering the power of culture, the public perception that Christian faith is embodied in conservative, culture-supporting institutions, we need a lively conversation about the transformative goals of Christian religious education and the impact we seek to have.

Conclusion

The field of Christian religious education is needed today as much as ever. It is true that many of the past practices of enhancing local church education and of creating large denominational structures for curriculum and publishing are no longer viable. Yet, learning constructive, intelligent Christian faith that makes a difference for people and communities is needed now more than ever before. We need to address expressly the embedded cultural practices of white supremacy and participate in the cultures of inclusion and hope that can be built.

I encourage us to be courageous, to engage in constructive theological reflection, to build educational partnerships, and to communicate the importance of religion in the language of the wider public. You know my hope. I hope we continue to struggle to seek the Way of Jesus. I hope we follow in the work of the disciples across time and cultures to build communities of redemptive living that nurture abundant living. I hope we stand on the shoulders of those who went before in our field and launch educational practices that engage fully faith and culture.

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The Classroom is a Public Space: Occupying Learning Outcomes to Foster Public-Facing Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

This paper emerged from a faculty collaborative on public-facing religious studies funded by the Henry Luce Foundation. Blending public humanities with a Theory of Change (ToC) approach, we generate a public-facing pedagogy for the undergraduate classroom that reimagines the boundaries between the university and the public. While this iteration of a public-facing pedagogy still speaks to institutional requirements like formulating course goals and assessing student learning, it does not rely on before and after measurements or building transferable skills. Rather, it stresses "occupying" those outcomes as a way of reenvisioning the classroom space, shifting the frame of pedagogy in ways that make evident the contribution of the deeper concerns of a university education to students' public roles as citizens and professionals. To demonstrate, we explore enacting two public-facing learning outcomes (regarding diversity and conflict) that are relevant regardless of area subspecialty in religious studies.

KEYWORDS

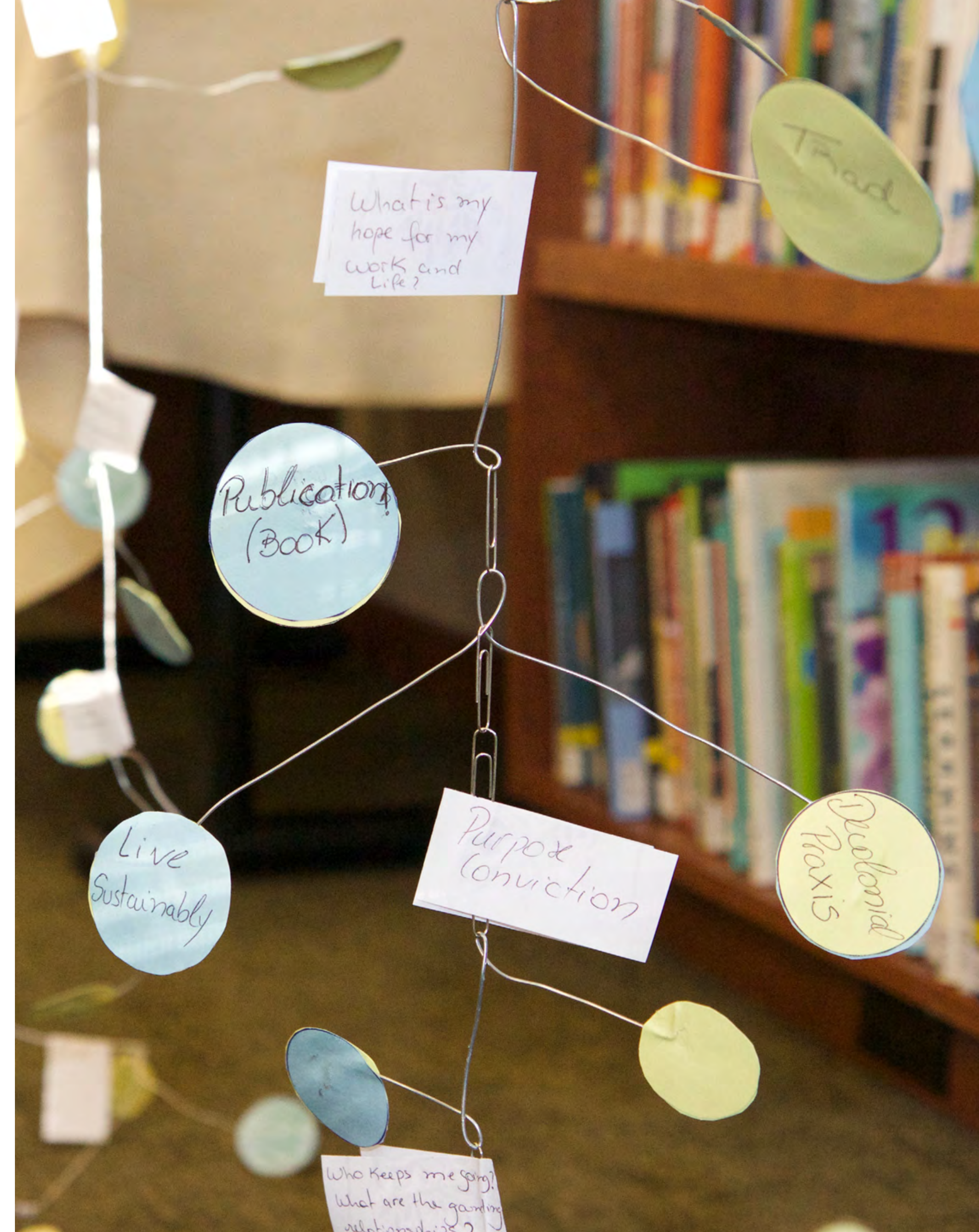
pedagogy, public-facing, Theory of Change, learning outcome, undergraduate education

Introduction: Shifting Away from Disciplinary Frames

Teaching undergraduate religious studies has always been a balancing act. Since the mid-20th century when religious studies programs began to emerge in universities, most faculties explicitly resisted any alignment between academic inquiry and confessional religious agendas. This separation encouraged teaching about the influence of religious systems in human communities while simultaneously expanding the number of religious traditions and practices considered. It also fostered using a broader array of methodologies and eventually, interrogating what constitutes religion itself. This version of religious studies, however, often equated academic work with secular positionality and established a sharp division between the academic study of religion and religious practice. While this approach helped establish credibility in the academy, it ceded the wider public conversation about religion, religious practice, and the influence of religion almost wholly to religious groups and institutions (Cady 1995; Griffin 2000; Jacobsen and Jacobsen 2012; McCutcheon 2001; Tweed 2016).

At the same time, religious studies departments and programs faced multiple internal institutional pressures that shaped the pedagogical practices of faculty. For instance, to demonstrate the utility of religious studies courses to a university education (and maintain the credit hour goals necessary to support a major, a minor, and sometimes a graduate program), many undergraduate religious studies faculty had to offer their courses as general education or core requirements for students. That effort often meant carving out distinctions from scholars who also explore religious systems, artifacts, and practices, but do so as anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, historians, philosophers, or scholars of music, art, or literature. Although key to institutional survival, defining such artificial boundaries posited religion as a distinct object that other disciplines do not fully understand and thereby reinforced the false separation of religious systems, practices, and ideas from their complex entanglements in the public arena.

Awareness of this artificial gap, alongside the poverty of many of the public conversations about religion, led many religious studies scholars to seek out nonsectarian opportunities to bring public concerns into the classroom as well as to interact with



Wabash participants in an early career workshop created these mobiles as visual representations of hopes and intents for their current and future teaching life.

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"the public" (Patton 2020). In many instances, the designation of "public" pointed to persons and spaces outside the university community. Consider, for instance, the many scholars and programs now embracing the idea of the public humanities, seeking to make the work of faculty (and students) visible through venues such as lecture series, workshops, films, podcasts, or via educational models like service learning and community-engaged research. Many of these efforts functioned within a "defense of the liberal arts" framework that carefully articulated what academically trained scholars contribute to larger community and cultural conversations. It is not accidental that this demonstration of the ongoing relevance of the field is just as much aimed at a "public" of administrators, colleagues, and students within the walls of the institution.

The recent Religious Literacy Guidelines established by the American Academy of Religion (AAR) illustrate these dynamics by saying that the goal of a "public-facing" pedagogical practice is "designing curricula to ensure that every graduate of a two- or four-year college program has gained a basic understanding of how religion is part of human experience" (AAR 2019). Achieving this end, however, requires that instructors stay firmly within the existing parameters of the field in two major ways. First, these guidelines underscore traditional notions about what distinguishes religious studies as an academic mode of inquiry over and against the work of religious communities (for example, "discern accurate and credible knowledge about diverse religious traditions and expressions" or "distinguish confessional or prescriptive statements about religion from descriptive or analytical statements"). Second, they present the classroom as a venue for acquiring specific types of knowledge that can be transmitted and assessed (for example, "Understand how religions have shaped—and are shaped by—the experiences and histories of individuals, communities, nations, and regions," "interpret how religious expressions make use of cultural symbols and artistic representations of their times and contexts," and "recognize the internal diversity within religious traditions"). This tendency of academic religious studies to maintain a descriptive approach toward religious systems and practitioners in the classroom and to posit a specific kind of expertise geared toward institutional acceptance and survival, enshrines the primacy of the university by offering students specialized knowledge with the hope that they can apply it when they are outside of its confines, rather than envisioning the borders between the university and the community as more permeable and interactive. Moreover, this vision of the field ignores the innovative paths by which faculty and students already navigate ideas about, practices grounded in, and commitments around religion in the classroom or in their communities and professional environments. In response to these concerns, this paper aims to conceptualize the religious studies classroom as itself a public and to think about public-facing pedagogy from that vantage point.

Understanding students as a public offers a different approach to public-facing pedagogy as well as a different way to address the survival of religious studies programs in the current higher educational environment. By freeing the classroom from an exclusive focus on disciplinary concerns, this public-facing pedagogy can instead tackle the complex entanglement of religion in a variety of public spaces. It allows for the explicit cultivation of learning options that explore the intricate ways religion impacts diverse aspects of public life, including in students' lives. To help generate and construct this distinctive notion of public-facing pedagogy, we borrow from how scholars in the public humanities conceptualize the boundaries between the university and the public, blending this understanding with work on the Theory of Change (ToC) which demonstrates how to put a long-range process into practice. We then explore two learning outcomes that speak to public-facing goals common to religious studies and to university education, one focused on diversity and one on conflict negotiation, and offer practical options for working with these outcomes in classroom instruction. In doing so, we suggest that these learning outcomes will illustrate the public work that can be done in a religious studies classroom, regardless of area of specialty.

Public Humanities: Moving Beyond Outreach

Public Humanities initiatives began emerging in universities in the late 20th century to move the academy to address problems of interest to a broader public (Smith and Weiland 1980; Boyer 1990; Jay 2010; Ayers 2009; O'Malley, Sandlin, and Burdick 2020; Schroeder 2021). A frequently cited goal was making apparent the importance of the humanities in promoting civic virtues needed to maintain a functioning democracy (Lewin 2010; Nussbaum 2010). Accomplishing that task often became enmeshed with demystifying the humanities by inviting the public into the educational process, while also demonstrating the broader appeal of humanities education to administrators (Jay 2010). In this iteration, the public humanities primarily signified outreach—the presentation of academic knowledge and methods in public spaces (Woodward 2009; Ellison and Eatman 2008) such as offering lecture series, writing in more accessible venues, or taking part on media panels around a given issue. While this model provides one of the simplest means of bringing academic voices to public audiences, some humanities advocates argue that it fails to truly engage the public in the development of academic knowledge and that it effectively preserves boundaries between academia and the public (Gale and Carton 2005). Other approaches addressed this criticism by stressing engagement with members of the public in the development of research and in the analysis of findings (Woodward 2009; Jay 2010). Scholars invested in this model construct collaborative efforts to build knowledge related to immediate local concerns (O'Malley, Sandlin, and Burdick 2020). Some argue that public humanities work should erase boundaries between academic experts and interested publics. As Gale and Carton describe their efforts in designing and implementing the "Writing Austin's Lives Project" at the University of Texas, this work requires "reorienting—if not dissolving entirely—the expert's stance" (2005, 42). This strategy includes engaged teaching (structuring the classroom itself around such projects or research efforts) as well as building a higher education infrastructure to support this work (Fisher 2021). Some programs, including in religious studies, established tracks for graduate students meant to guide humanities scholars toward public careers outside of academia or to shape their emerging academic work as publicly focused. These efforts ensured that the work of public humanities would continue through future generations of scholars (Woodward 2009).

Few of these models, however, take seriously the opportunities and challenges for public engagement presented in the undergraduate religious studies classroom in a nonsectarian setting. Recent data indicate that about two percent of all four-year students enroll in a religious studies course (Patterson and Townsend 2021). The vast majority of these students are not religious studies majors; most are fulfilling a general education or core credit and likely will not enroll in another religious studies course. Still, these classrooms present a singular opportunity to demonstrate to a public audience in excess of 200,000 people each year what religious studies offers to the communities and professions these students represent. Moreover, given that the survival of many religious studies programs depends on student enrollment, we call for faculty to consider forging learning outcomes that directly seek to develop the skills students need to negotiate with religion in their public lives as both citizens and professionals. Doing this work, however, requires rethinking learning outcomes in a larger temporal frame. For this component of the task, the administrative model called Theory of Change is useful.

Theory of Change: Broadening the Temporal Horizon of Learning

Many educators (as well as students and college graduates) know from experience that the lessons learned in the classroom will rarely manifest in any single academic term. Indeed, accurately measuring what students learn in a given classroom is often not something that can be quantified (Warner 2016; Worthen 2018). In many instances, what students learn will not become fully apparent even over the course of a student's earning of a degree. Thus, part of the difficulty with writing course goals and learning outcomes and even mission statements is a restrictive temporal frame. Theory of Change models can help rethink this sticking point. Although primarily used by nonprofit organizations as part of evaluation and assessment of long-term goals (Brown 2019), ToC approaches are attractive in an educational setting precisely because they envision educational learning goals, both on a course and a program level, as processes. As Anderson argues: "At its most basic, a theory of change explains how a group of early and intermediate accomplishments sets the stage for producing long-range results" (Anderson 2006, 1). In a ToC model, instructors identify a long-term goal (developing the capacity to interact meaningfully with persons whose identities, lives, experiences, and ideas may be different from one's own), recognizing that such a goal likely falls beyond one's power to achieve (in ToC lingo, it exists beyond an "accountability ceiling") (Brown 2019). The instructor then engages in a process of backward mapping that identifies the specific intermediate steps toward that longer-term goal that are feasible within a given setting (within the organization, institution, or program, or sometimes, within a given classroom). "Everything in… (this) pathway of change is a precondition to the long-term goal" (Anderson 2006, 5). Part of mapping these preconditions entails determining and organizing shorter-term, medium-term, and longer-term outcomes for each precondition, and developing indicators to mark what defines success in its achievement. Moreover, the planner develops interventions or activities that specify "how" those intermediate steps will be attained.

Applying this model to pedagogy and inspired by the Occupy movement's seizure of public spaces to "facilitate participatory democracy" (Lubin 2012), we call this process "occupying our outcomes" because this kind of consciously considered approach to learning empowers faculty to inhabit the classroom differently. Indeed, by using ToC models to reenvision the learning framework, we can move beyond simple "before and after" assessments of learning that leave out the longer-range learning that many educators value. Learning goals inspired by ToC orient both faculty and students in the direction of taking measurable steps toward something larger, without feeling the pressure to integrate the complex and complicated parts of that longer-term effort and thus underplaying the real work necessary to effect change on often intractable issues.

Occupying Public-Facing Outcomes

This section offers two learning outcomes—one on diversity and one on conflict—whose implementation can shift the frame of pedagogy beyond the concerns of academic sub-disciplines in favor of recognizing that the work done in the classroom unfolds in, and as, a public space. The aim of working with learning outcomes is to forefront and fine-tune how course work in religious studies enhances students' personal or professional lives by making public-facing concerns the explicit work that students and instructors do together. We follow each outcome with a series of concrete exercises which focus on showing how forms of learning that are already happening in many religious studies classrooms can be transformed within a public-facing frame. These exercises define the public in different ways. Whereas some of this effort envisions students as constituting an actual public among themselves, others address students as aspiring professionals, and thus as a public that is in formation.

Outcome #1: Diversity

Religious studies courses assist people in bracketing their own perspectives and values (worldviews) in order to listen to and attempt to understand perspectives and values that are distinct, and perhaps even antithetical, to their own—without necessarily abandoning their own commitments and perspectives.

This effort involves (a) listening to and understanding others' perspectives, histories, and values; (b) recognizing, bracketing, and analyzing one's own perspectives and values; and (c) unlearning exclusionary frames of what counts as religion as well as cultivating ways of seeing and hearing that recognize the tremendous variety of religious views, practices, and experiences.

Diversity (see Figure 1) is at once the most obvious and most challenging aspect of religious studies public-facing goals. Obvious, because addressing the tremendous breadth of religious expression has long been an underlying value of the field. Challenging, because no less entrenched assumptions have elevated

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Figure 1: Outcome—Diversity

hegemonic forms of Christianity (primarily Protestant traditions and models from Christian sectarianism) at the expense of predominantly non-white traditions.

The primary component of any diversity outcome is asking students not only to learn about themselves, their attitudes and point of view regarding religious others but also to consider what is equally meaningful and precious to other cultures, religious groups, and individuals. It requires both their willingness to listen as well as the instructor's willingness to work through an unruly process as students struggle to have a stable sense of their own positionality while acknowledging the validity of other positions. As a set of skills, the ability to negotiate (or even appreciate) diversity is an uneven process. Rarely linear, it does not lend itself to easy assessment (nor is it easily attained!). Rather than a clearly delineated task that one masters, classroom work on diversity is an incremental process—a prime example of why ToC is relevant to religious studies classrooms.

Developing a set of assignments and in and out of class conversations to support a lifetime effort toward attaining this diversity goal might demonstrate something religious studies scholars have long known—that one of the best ways to recognize one's own assumptions is to attempt to listen to and understand someone else's assumptions. But this way of reckoning with diversity also demands that students become aware of their own worldview. One cannot bracket what one does not yet recognize. Additionally, this learning to listen across differences requires students to explore ideas beyond what they have always believed they knew about themselves and religio-social others. Further, it usually means learning that seeing the internal logic of a different worldview does not necessitate embracing that worldview, and that doing such work is the foundation of being open to diversity. Unpacked, this means that students need an open environment to explore other ideas led by their own curiosity (which instructors may first need to cultivate).

The following three exercises demonstrate ways to approach these issues.

Diversity Exercise #1: Negotiating Diversity in a Biblical Studies or Religion and Culture Classroom

This learning activity is designed as a beginning or introductory intervention toward the specific preconditions for achieving the diversity goal. Significantly, it can easily be adapted in different types of courses covering a range of topics.

Listening to the perspective of others is the first of the three interlocking skills in the diversity outcome. If an instructor asks of students something as simple as to "shout out" details from the story of the Garden of Eden, one can anticipate various details emerging. Some might reflect a connection to Jewish, Christian, or Muslim traditions, while others might be cultural commonplaces reflected in music, art, literature, or television. These details should be preserved by the instructor, with attention to chronological sequencing. There will likely be Adam, Eve, a serpent (who may or may not be Satan or Iblis), and some trees (including one with an apple). Sex will be involved; students typically picture the woman alone with that serpent; they are only later rejoined by the man and she then "tempts" him.

While lively and fun, this activity offers an opportunity to point out places where student narratives diverge or conflict. In this way, students begin to recognize that the classroom is not a homogenous space where everyone brings the same perspective, even to something as simple as a story. Christian or Muslim students, for instance, might introduce the concept of the "fall" of humanity, while other students might read the text as nothing more than a prescientific fairytale about the origins of humanity and common human experiences (for example, why it can be difficult to cultivate food, why childbirth can be painful for women). Observations like these provide the opportunity for students to begin recognizing their own perspectives and values.

Then, a nonconfrontational way to help students think about bracketing their own perspectives is for the instructor to highlight how long-held assumptions about the story may not stand up to close scrutiny. For instance, one might put forward the 1952 Revised Standard Version of the Bible which does not translate the Hebrew [illegible] ('im·māh) or "with her" in Genesis 3:6. This omission leaves English readers (who also cannot distinguish the second masculine plural pronoun—alongside the serpent's—built into the Hebrew verbs from a singular "you") with the impression that the woman and the serpent are conversing privately. It can be helpful to display this textual piece alongside artistic representations such as William Blake's The Temptation of Eve, the music video for Metallica's Until It Sleeps (which shows the woman with the serpent before the man joins), or even the sexual banter between Lucifer Morningstar and Eve (yes, that Eve) in Season 4 of the Netflix series Lucifer. These comparisons demonstrate how easily one might conclude that the woman alone gives in to temptation as opposed to also holding accountable the man who (at least in the Genesis text) is standing there all along, silent. This insight might be a door for some students to recognizing that they bring assumptions to this story that shape the way they understand it.

But does such a lesson transfer? That is, does this small exercise support "unlearning" one exclusionary framework and open one up to the tremendous variety of religious views, practices, and experiences? Probably not. But does it destabilize students just enough to move them toward more listening? Does it help to see that there is not simply one way of viewing a text, but an interpretive history that can go in multiple directions depending on the needs of a community? In this way, students who hold a particular view might begin to think through why that view evolved and what value there is in maintaining it. Here it is fun to look at the implications of various readings and why certain ideas persist while others fall away. By no means does one such exercise achieve an understanding of diversity, much less an ability to navigate in a diverse world. But it does, in a ToC paradigm, begin in a small way to work with a particular public in a classroom (and no telling what the composition of that public might be) by accounting for diverse points of view and thinking through divergences from one's own presuppositions.

Diversity Exercise #2: Diversity in Religious Belief and Practice—Asian Traditions

This exercise is from a lower division general education class designed to introduce students to the study of religion as well as the content of various religious traditions. It pivots on an image known as The Vinegar Tasters, an allegorical representation of the Buddha, Lao Tze, and Confucius tasting vinegar from a vat. Each figure clearly has a very different reaction to the flavor, an illustration of their perspective on life. The attitudes represented in the image offer a rough character study for each figure as students read chapters of the Tao te Ching, selections from the Analects, and several Koans and Sutras.

In groups of two or three, students consider the tenets of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism covered in the class, integrating what they have learned regarding the different worldviews of those traditions with the images and their assigned primary source. As they discuss the texts they consider the implications of their chapter—who is its audience, what is its goal or solution, what might each chapter be saying about government, conflict, daily life, ritual, and community; how do these example texts address a way of living? The final step in the exercise is to take on the role of the Buddha, Lao Tzu, or Confucius. Students use dramatic readings to present their chapter to the class. This process infuses the texts with some emotional and interpretive energy, and often provides an opportunity for some theatrical expression in the class. They then field questions about what the saying means or how to interpret it. As different perspectives from each tradition are expressed, the class generates Venn diagrams of each of the worldviews—how do ideas expressed in the sayings overlap? What is excluded in one or another? How does each relate to living in a state, a community, or as an individual? Hopefully, students begin to see the ways in which a person can be religiously diverse.

Diversity is multivalent as well. Individuals are often religiously diverse, more than our sometimes-static categories of religious tenets indicate. To carry the lessons forward, students are asked to hold onto their chapter and consider it between our meetings. They are instructed to keep it in mind in different classes and when they are hanging out or talking with friends and family and consider how their interactions might be different if they are applying this framework. At the beginning of the next class we discuss the experiences and reflections that students are comfortable sharing. Even those who choose not to speak in class hear their colleagues' processes and reflections. All this work leads to a reflective written assignment: what did you learn that surprised you (for example) and why. This exercise develops an appreciation of the multiple ways that people can hold religious ideas that may on the surface appear to conflict; it asks students to consider the ways in which people can be practitioners of two or more kinds of traditions that are "religious," and thus explore a different kind of diversity.

An immediate goal of this exercise is to introduce the variety of religions practiced in contemporary Asia through primary texts and historical context. Students engage in (a) listening to and understanding others' perspectives, histories, and values through direct encounter with texts; (b) recognizing, bracketing, and analyzing their own perspectives and values in discussion with other students; and (c) broadening their understanding of diversity beyond the idea of a monolithic Buddhism, Taoism, or "Asian tradition" to a more complex view as they process the texts and contexts. This exercise begins to complicate a simplistic view of those traditions, exposing the porous nature of the categories of religion, tradition, and diversity as well as the flexibility of practice and belief. The rather monolithic understanding of Buddhism, for example, has to be bracketed as students encounter their own limited knowledge. Beyond the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path is a vast landscape of religious worldviews that students do not know that they do not know. In other words, another aspect of students learning to bracket their own assumptions and beliefs in this larger segment of a world religions class is recognizing the limits of their own understanding.

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This set of classes often leads to a crack in students' perceptions of their own religious worldviews as they see the bare edge of religious diversity within these traditions. The symbiotic relationship between ritual and belief, often obscured in Protestant Christianity, is at the forefront of the conversation here, expanding students' perspectives on the primacy of belief as a necessary category for what constitutes a religion, which often excludes rather than includes people's lived experiences. This may not be a complete paradigm shift for students, yet a ToC perspective recognizes the importance of this step in the larger goals of religious studies.

Diversity Exercise #3: Exploring Diversity—Race and Religion in Afro-Caribbean Traditions

This multistep exercise is from a class on religions in Latin America where students study Afro-Caribbean traditions, including but not limited to Vodou. While few have ever heard of other Afro-Caribbean traditions, media representations of Vodou make that tradition a controversial issue for some students. This activity follows initial class discussions that are frequently frustrating to students as they confront their preconceived ideas about a complex worldview that does not differ from their own as much as they expect. These exchanges, ideally, lay the foundation for the longer work of this assignment by introducing the need to recognize bias in the ways religious ideas are named and interpreted.

Using resources such as the Vodou Archive, students work in small groups. Their task is to learn about practices, devotions, and hybridized Catholic and African elements of Vodou through curated written and video sources in order to create an academic research project. After some initial research, the first piece of the assignment is a short class presentation by each group. Students are asked to avoid comparison (for example, this is different from my religion), focusing instead on how to imagine a religious perspective in its own terms. Wrestling with the challenge of seeing a tradition in its own terms can help students develop a deeper consciousness of their religio-cultural tradition. This exercise combines the outcomes of bracketing and listening as students encounter the Archive's collections, taking an initial step in identifying their own reactions and perspectives as they encounter another worldview through reading, watching, and listening to sources on Vodou.

The initial presentation and encounter with primary sources provide the foundation of a larger individual project. As they continue their research, students produce a longer written piece, such as a blog or an interactive paper that can include visual and videographic materials from the archive. As the written project develops, students are required to discuss the entanglements of politics, race, and religion in the development and representation of the Afro-Caribbean tradition. This continues an emphasis on listening to and wrestling with understanding the impact of history on the development of religious values, practices, and beliefs. In this work, students are developing the skills from both the first and second learning outcomes: understanding others' perspectives and recognizing and bracketing their own.

To complete this assignment, students must examine perspectives on the Atlantic slave trade, thinking about how Afro-Caribbean traditions are shaped by those realities. This work can be painful, as students grapple with the deep legacy of racism and its expression in the study of these religious traditions. Moreover, the role of ancestors, altars with images and objects from multiple cultures and traditions, and rituals in nontraditional spaces such as the home and the cemetery, all challenge students' existing categories for religion. As students learn to engage critically with the variety of Vodou practices, they also begin to encounter the way the field of religious studies has used various colonial and exclusionary categories to classify Afro-Caribbean religions outside the parameters of so-called traditional religions. This encompasses the third learning outcome of unlearning some of what students understand as religion.

While these objectives are crucial for recognizing diversity in the human expression of religions and might be considered the short-term ToC goal, they also connect with a larger goal of realizing the various historical factors that shape our experiences of the world. Religions are blended, dynamic activities, entangled with history, politics, economics, and lived experiences, shaped by humans who are often looking for something that "works" in their circumstances (Brown 2006). As an academic exercise, this work provides a dive into a little-known tradition using academic sources, and thereby assists students in developing research skills. But this exercise does more. In line with the rest of the materials in this class, this assignment develops students' concepts of African-based indigenous religions, the Atlantic slave trade, the diversity of practice in Roman Catholic Christianity, local expressions of global religions, and the ways these entangled elements create different frames of reference for religious experiences. In these ways, it is a powerful introduction to all three of our identified steps in engaging the diversity outcome—listening, bracketing, and reframing perspectives.

Outcome #2: Negotiating Conflict

To formulate responses to situations of conflict that genuinely foster the relationships that underlie the situation. To use students' terms, this involves learning how to call people in rather than call them out.

This effort involves: (a) identifying diverse stakeholders; (b) analyzing the issues driving conflicts; and (c) formulating inclusive ways of negotiating conflict to produce what is called positive peace. Positive peace is a term taken from peace and conflict studies that distinguishes peace as more than the mere absence of conflict or violence; building positive peace requires attending to underlying relationships and structural injustices.

No student should leave college without cultivating skills for negotiating conflict (see Figure 2). Studying religion challenges participants to examine the ways in which differing religious orientations and perspectives contribute to conflicts on local, national, and international levels. But that same study of religion also invites participants to build skills in facing and utilizing conflict by identifying structures that are supportive of the process of building real peace and justice. Thus, not only does attending to conflict make the public-facing nature of the religious studies classroom glaringly evident, it also has the advantage of putting privatizing misperceptions about religion directly on the table.

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Figure 2: Outcome—Negotiating Conflict

While the United States is by no means monolithic, much of American public discourse is deeply averse to conflict. Whether minimizing conflict or aggressively inciting it through tweets that flame or vent, both stances avoid productive discourse around points of disagreement. At least initially, the largest issue with asking students to negotiate conflict arises from the fact that teachers as well as students have been trained to avoid conflict without realizing that is what we are doing. We distract, we ignore, we legislate it away, we confuse addressing conflict with deciding who is right. These are all forms of negative peace. The list of maneuvers by which we can sidestep the work of positive peace is long, somatic, and habitual. As a consequence, building skills that address conflict requires repeated practice and feedback, as well as careful mapping of introductory, intermediate, and advanced skill levels.

It is important to distinguish courses that study conflict as one theme among many from courses that aim to build conflict negotiation skills. In the former case, one can weave conflict as a theme into an existing course. For example, in an Apocalypse class, one could explore how apocalyptic narratives make it difficult for adherents to imagine concrete and mundane ways of tackling social conflicts. Building practical skills at addressing conflict, however, works best when a course is designed specifically around conflict negotiation as its primary outcome. Departments with a robust religious studies major might opt to reserve the skill-development aspects of this goal for upper-level courses populated by majors. But this goal can successfully be implemented in lower-level general education courses (as long as enrollment is not above fifty students or teaching assistants are available)—if those courses are oriented toward conflict negotiation not as one issue among many, but as the primary skill which students and teachers build together. Much of the work in such a course entails helping students cultivate a feedback loop between concrete case studies and meta-reflection on what is meant by "peace" and "conflict."

Some cautions: in courses dedicated to conflict negotiation as their primary goal, it is important to consider situations in which religion plays other roles than a source of conflict. It is also important to consider situations in which ethical issues do not appear as conflict (in the sense of various goods that are pitted against each other). Not only is it a mistake to reduce ethics to conflict, but ethics is not a category that students often already have available for their thinking—a fact which becomes less surprising after considering how deeply confounded the American public currently is regarding ethics, both in the context of citizenship and in the professions. Finally, being clear upfront about the difference between negotiating conflict and activism can avoid unhelpful misunderstandings: activists do need to learn how to de-escalate and negotiate conflict, but the skills students learn through the tripartite frame of conflict resolution are narrower than activism or advocacy. Conflict negotiation can provide one arrow in an activist quiver—not the whole quiver.

Conflict Case Study #1: Conflict and Climate—Teaching Climate Change in the Religious Studies Classroom

This activity is designed for a class specifically focused on religions and environmental issues but can be modified for other classes focused on ethical issues and conflict negotiation. Even though students may describe feeling uncertain or indecisive about climate change, they will have nonetheless heard many views and claims through their lives that will inevitably shape their attitudes. This multi-stage activity encourages students to recognize the various influences on their thinking that might have previously gone unacknowledged, to consider other points of view, and to find ways to communicate across diverse perspectives. Each step is essential for engaging in productive conversations with others. Activities such as this one can reveal surprising differences and help students move beyond assumptions that all group members agree on a subject, or even that full agreement is possible with an issue as complex as climate change.

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Step One: establish a baseline. One of the first barriers encountered in discussions of climate change is oversimplification. Much public discourse on the subject centers on questions of whether climate change is happening or not, and if so, whether it is anthropogenic or a result of natural climatic fluctuations. Before engaging in group discussion, it is therefore necessary to allow students time to reflect on their own knowledge about the subject. Beyond questions such as "Is climate change real?" that can be answered yes or no without much further thought, students are first asked to individually reflect on what they know about the causes of anthropogenic climate change and the expected impacts. For example, they may be asked to reflect and write on the following questions: "In your understanding, what are some of the causes given for anthropogenic climate change? What evidence do people tend to use in their discussions of climate change? What are some of the expected impacts of climate change on human and natural communities?" If students are hesitant to express their own views, the questions may be framed as "what have you heard others say about," and so on.

After reflecting individually, the teacher can invite students to share the elements they have listed. This is an ideal place to introduce the concept of "wicked problems": problems that engage too much complexity to ever be solved, and have no solutions that will satisfy all stakeholders (Bauman and O'Brien 2020). As religion and ecology scholars Bauman and O'Brien argue, however, such issues need not contribute to a sense of hopelessness but should encourage people to reconsider how challenges are addressed in ongoing processes rather than through definitive, one-time solutions. After collecting several responses, the activity may move to the next step.

Step Two: engaging multiple views. Students can easily feel attacked when discussing their own views in class, particularly around sensitive subjects like religion and climate change. Rather than critiquing views that students have offered, then, step two moves to encounter various attitudes about climate change from alternative sources. In this phase, the teacher presents various competing views about climate change and its impacts through short video or reading presentations.

While absorbing these different perspectives, students outline their basic arguments, noting the proposed causes and impacts of climate change from each, as well as the evidence cited and the ultimate proposal offered in response. This can be facilitated by a simple worksheet to guide students' through the sources. Students may be asked, beyond just "climate change," what is the specific threat presented in each case: for example, does the presentation highlight, sea level rise, drought, heat, economic decline and poverty due to lack of access to cheap fossil fuels based on overly enthusiastic policy changes, and so on? These can be compared to the options already listed on the board. Students should also consider what evidence the presenter draws upon to make this case—not just general terms like science or the Bible, but what kinds of scientific evidence or what kinds of Biblical or theological texts? What will be the impacts (or not) of climate change, according to this source: ecological collapse, human suffering (if so, which humans), and so on? What does this person/group suggest we should do: Change our own consumption, remodel the global energy economy, invest more in research and development, nothing? After outlining the basic components of these arguments, students may begin to compare them with their own responses and the other options listed on the board from the first part of the exercise.

At this point, the class will have discussed numerous potential impacts of climate change and responses to it. Moving beyond the various impacts cited by others, students should now be encouraged to think about the underlying values guiding these concerns. If climate change will increase poverty, why is poverty bad? What values guide a person's interest in helping the poor and needy? Can two people disagree about climate change and yet still agree that we have a moral mandate to help the poor? Can humans "hurt" the earth? Might a person who disagrees that the earth can be hurt not also agree that conservation of resources or preservation of beautiful landscapes is ethically good? The group can also highlight and think through assumptions on the part of presenters—for example, what is scientific uncertainty and to what degree should such a thing influence behaviors and policies? People often indicate that they act and believe in a way according to their religion, but do they?

While this can be a wide-ranging discussion, students should begin to see how views about climate change and responses to it are not always about who is right or wrong, but that these disagreements often entail matters of fundamental values—and not just religious morals, but ideas about the value of nature, economic systems, human life, and more. While they will have seen many places of disagreement between these various presentations, and perhaps themselves, they should also see points of basic agreement. Because these first two steps primarily entail class discussion and reflection, students may be assessed in terms of participation and engagement. They may also be asked to submit short written reflections for further evaluation of their engagement with the assignment (a method that can be useful for students who tend to remain quiet in class discussion or who require longer periods of time to process their thoughts than class discussion sometimes allows).

Step Three: communicating for change. Initially, students were invited to express their views on an issue, but conflict negotiation entails actively listening to others and highlighting spots of agreement and disagreement that might not be apparent to the individuals themselves. It is in these areas where people might facilitate more productive discussions about practical issues. Given that climate change is an issue that is happening and will have impacts regardless of what actions humans take, it is an event that will shape our lives and the lives of others for generations. Agreeing to disagree is not an option. By focusing on deeper points of agreement rather than simplistic and dichotomous differences, students should feel encouraged about the potential for addressing some of the direst impacts of climate change. A final reflective writing exercise thus helps students to consider their abilities to find and negotiate through common ground with others on seemingly impassible differences related to climate change and religion.

In the final journal assignment, students reflect on the following prompt: "Psychological studies indicate that children and young adults suffer from climate anxiety, worrying about their futures and livelihoods. Based on our class discussions, what would you say to a high school junior or senior to help them cope with climate anxiety? How can this high school student reframe their ideas about the world and career goals to emphasize realistic hope rather than anxiety and hopelessness about this situation? What should they do about the various conflicting arguments about climate change and its impacts that they may encounter?" Students should be given time to write on this topic outside of the class period, and the class may revisit their responses in later meetings. With this assignment, students may demonstrate their conflict negotiation abilities by advising an imaginary high school student on how to negotiate the complexities of climate change. They may also reflect upon the ways that their own thinking on this issue has changed through discussion. Students are also encouraged to see themselves as leaders who bring unique skills to public discourse surrounding a complex issue in this reflection. Responses may be evaluated based on the degree to which they refer to specific insights gathered in the class discussion and provide specific examples of possible solutions to challenges related to climate change.

Conflict Case Study # 2: Negotiating Conflict around Religion in a Non-Religious Studies Classroom

This example comes from a health ethics course which is a required class in a school for health professions and taught by a faculty member trained in religion to attract students to a religion department track in religion and medicine. While not a religion class, classes like this one increasingly are in the portfolios of religious studies faculty, whether aimed at a general student population, majors or minors interested in religion and medicine, or for health professionals in training. In this course, religion is a direct focus in the materials considered: think Jehovah's Witnesses refusing blood transfusions or conscientious exemptions on the part of health care providers (including employers) who provide insurance. In many other instances, religion is one issue among many entangled in a given circumstance: think assisted suicide, requests for prayer, holding out for a miracle, or how religious or ethical beliefs regarding suffering can influence attitudes towards pain medication. Whatever the specific cases, such a course makes it concretely (and often painfully) evident how learning to account for people's sensitivity around religion can enhance students' understanding of negotiating conflict, whether in their own circumstances, as citizens confronting difficult issues, or in future careers in the health professions.

This example conceptualizes a class oriented entirely around case studies, which is common for dedicated ethics classes (such as health ethics or business ethics, both of which can incorporate significant religious studies content). But it also works for introductory courses such as World Religions or Introduction to Religious Studies. The class described here utilizes a flipped classroom format where readings are devoted to necessary background material, lectures and clarification are handled online, and classroom time is devoted to working through cases according to the threefold framework of this goal: identifying the stakeholders, identifying the conflict, and formulating inclusive responses that foster positive peace. Much like inquiry-based learning, the work of classroom discussion concerns determining what information is salient; when, whether, and how to assess and prioritize different claims; and how to move toward action. (More limited adaptations of this method for classes structured differently will receive attention at the example's conclusion.)

The first step in working with a case—identifying the stakeholders—builds on the diversity outcome. It requires students to recognize their assumptions as assumptions, to develop skills at bracketing to put their assumptions aside in order to listen carefully and compassionately to all parties in a given case.

The second step—identifying the conflict driving a case—pushes students to do more than be good listeners. Here, students must draw on the information and knowledge they have to recognize the issues that need to be addressed. In this work there is also a need to recognize that those issues may be different from the immediate disagreement that allowed the conflict to surface.

But it is the third step—formulating inclusive responses that foster positive peace—which is the hardest skill. In many ways, this stage asks students to shift away from finding the right answer toward prioritizing relationships of all the stakeholders (the patient and their loved ones as well as the health care team). Prioritizing relationships can help students resist the urge to get rid of the conflict, to "manage" it as the phrase goes, in favor of creating some space in which they can begin to imagine the possibility of approaching something like positive peace.

A key factor in helping students imagine how to privilege relationships centers on re-thinking their notion of ethics. While the first few weeks of the course instruct students in the four principles of bioethics (autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, and justice), these principles do not tell students what to do. Instead, they form a matrix out of which ethical decisions can be made. Students struggle with this idea, not least because most health care decisions involve choices between bad options and there is pain in sorting through that reality. As a result, when teaching this kind of course, it is important not to minimize the challenge of dealing with cases that are not only difficult but often unresolvable, day after day, and week after week.

Another factor contributing to the challenge of this third step arises from where the students in this class are developmentally in their professional training: students want to inhabit the role of the expert who single-handedly (or single-mindedly) determines what must be done. This desire, however, flies in the face of the way that most health care providers work: in teams. More seriously, the tendency to insist on expertise as a way to circumvent the difficulty that many young adults often have with ambiguity can come across in a health care context as a "power-over" move; thus, the course devotes considerable reading and discussion to power issues in health communication.

Forms of assessment can include papers focused on depth analysis of a single case as well as an exam in which ques-

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tions are designed to target the specific stages of the three-part process. Because the course also aims to cultivate ethical formation or virtue ethics (which largely falls outside its accountability ceiling), the final exercise asks them to use a virtue ethics framework and reflect on two things they have learned about negotiating conflict, preferably in the specific context of their particular subfield of the health professions.

For courses and programs where it is not feasible to focus on case studies in each class period, a stepwise approach is also possible: students are introduced to a particular form of conflict, they acquire the knowledge and skills and do the unlearning that they need to grapple with that conflict, and then they synthesize what they have learned by reconsidering a particular case. For example, a course on religion and medicine oriented around teaching the skills necessary for negotiating plural medical systems could begin with a case study such as Anne Fadiman's The Spirit Catches You (2012), which details the barriers that Lia and her Hmong family encounter when attempting to obtain treatment for Lia's seizures. The issue of religio-cultural barriers to health care as dramatized by Lia's situation becomes the frame for the course, which builds toward returning to Lia's case and suggesting better ways of responding than the tragedy that unfolded for Lia. An example of a final paper would ask students to pretend they are orienting the incoming interns at the hospital Lia attended: what do interns need to know to help them care for patients like Lia?

Conclusions

In rethinking what a public-facing pedagogy might entail, we have argued that the religious studies classroom itself is a public space. Further, some longer-term public-facing goals may not be achievable in any one given class, a ToC model is helpful in creating shorter, intermediate, and longer-term steps we can take towards those goals. Moreover, by thinking about this work in terms of occupying our outcomes, we empower faculty and students to inhabit the classroom differently.

We have further offered some sample outcomes and exercises to demonstrate this work. Neither the outcomes or the exercises should strike anyone who teaches religious studies as novel or groundbreaking. Indeed, they are the kinds of practices that unfold in religious studies classrooms every day. What makes this material distinctive is the framework in which these efforts take place. Focusing on learning outcomes that are shared across specific sub-disciplines effects a shift in how faculty approach the classroom. Rather than foregrounding the content of religious studies, the point of the classroom is to use religion as a privileged site for engagement with the public (whether that public be the actual classroom or the future public of a profession). Taking the classroom seriously as a public (in these dual dimensions of students' lives as citizens and as professionals) leads to designing courses that follow the entanglements of religion in public concerns, and that explicitly work on cultivating the skills necessary to address these concerns. This paper focused on negotiating diversity and conflict because skills in these areas are so evidently needed today, but designing other goals is of course not only possible and desirable but also necessary.

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No Tears, No Fears: A Writer's Proactive Approach to Workshop

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I remember during my first residency, in December 2011, in the Creative Writing Master of Fine Arts (MFA) program at the Vermont College of Fine Arts (VCFA) standing outside Noble Hall after workshop talking to a friend when a student from my workshop joined us and asked if I'd seen the student whose story we discussed in class.

> *"No, why?" I asked.*
> *"I just wanted to make sure she's okay. She was crying."*
> *"She was crying?"*

With stunning alacrity my mind zoomed back to a moment when I was in first grade and sitting in class behind Charlotte Schwartz, whose straight blonde hair I found endlessly fascinating. In this memory she turned around in her desk chair and had tears in her enormous blue eyes. She told me the boy in front of her said the picture she was drawing was ugly. I specifically remember being disturbed because I was certain the boy said this for no other reason than to be mean (of course it didn't occur to me that maybe he was offering a particular criticism on the validity of her art, but I was only six after all), and this struck me as just plain wrong.

Now, a confession: Charlotte appealed to me because I already had a reputation for being a defender. I didn't like kids being unkind, and I didn't like kids getting picked on. Though I have no specific memory of it, it is highly likely this boy and I later that day had an encounter on the playground that would make him think twice before offering unhelpful criticism again. I abhor violence now but back then, when I was six, hitting was efficient and effective. In the classroom, though, I just said to Charlotte, "You tell him you like your picture just fine. It's a nice picture."

This childhood instinct of mine is still here. When I heard the student from workshop was crying, my heart wanted to go to that place of jumping in and defending her and her writing: "You tell them your story is just fine! It's a good story." My head said, "Well, no, wait a minute. Yes, it was a good story, and we had a vigorous discussion, but there was nothing mean-spirited about it. There was a lot to talk about with the piece and most of the comments were interesting and useful. Why was she crying?"

And, honestly, I can never know for certain why she was crying. I could have been the one who said something that made her cry. She could have been relieved workshop was over! Who knows? Whatever the case, she was having an emotional response to what went on in that classroom and I kept thinking the situation didn't have to have happened. I didn't know how to convey what I wanted to say in a way that would be comforting or helpful to her, so I didn't do anything.

But the event stayed on my mind through the rest of my residencies because it kept coming back to me again and again in different versions. Once or twice more I heard about writers crying after their workshops, but my more frequent experience involved my being in conversations in which fellow writers would talk, some seriously, some jokingly—but I think in the kind of joking that bears truth—about being anxious, tense, and concerned about workshop. I tried to ignore it. I thought this kind of fear was like a fly. I figured most writers swatted it away long enough to get something written—a workshop is an annoyance to be sure, but not a life and death matter. However, I've come to see that how we go into workshop can become a life and death matter in terms of the survival of our writing lives.

Here's what I mean: Nancy Slonim Aronie is the author of the book Writing from the Heart (1998), and she's the director of the Chilmark Writing Workshop on Martha's Vineyard. Nancy is in her 60s and has been writing a long time. She used to do commentaries for National Public Radio, she's taught at Harvard, she lectures on writing all over the place. I met her in February 2014 at an event where she was the keynote speaker. During her talk she told the story of how at one point in her career, when she lived in Connecticut, she was invited to join a writer's circle, kind of like an ongoing workshop of writers, "known and unknown" as she described it. The group itself was well known and Nancy was excited to have the opportunity to work with them and thrilled to be invited. She talked about going to this gorgeous house for her first meeting where she and the other writers were served a marvelous peach cobbler and they discussed one of the writers' short stories. Nancy thought the story was one of the most beautiful pieces of writing she'd ever read, but no one in the room said a positive thing about it. They ripped it to shreds with one woman even commenting in a tight, lock-jawed voice, "Oh, Sally, you just don't give up, do you?"

Nancy went home and told her husband two things: the peach cobbler was the best she'd ever had, and these writers were all horrible people. "Are you going back?" he asked. She said, "Yes." At the next meeting Nancy found herself at another gorgeous Connecticut home where she ate wonderful blueberry scones and listened as she heard another excellent story torn apart in their discussion. Nancy was stunned. She returned with a similar report for her husband: "Terrible people, but I loved the scones!" "Are you going back?" he asked. She said, "Yes."

The third time she went, it was Nancy's turn to have a story critiqued. She arrived at the host's well-appointed home and sat with a legal pad on her lap. She listened, nodded, and took pages and pages of notes. She told us she said to herself, "Uh huh, uh huh, wow, I had no idea this story was such a piece of crap." We laughed when Nancy told us that part of the story, and I expected Nancy to tell us something heroic. Maybe she shredded her notes in their faces and stalked out. Maybe she told them they didn't know a thing about good writing. At the very least, I thought she was going to say she knew not to take the group too seriously. But that's not what happened. Afterwards, Nancy said, when the discussion was over and this fabulous apple crisp was served, she took her apple crisp and left. She sat in her car and tried to eat the dessert, but she was so upset she couldn't swallow. Nancy went home and didn't write again for two years (Aronie 2014). She lost two years of her writing life despite knowing how bad this group was, despite knowing she was about to receive the hatchet job of a lifetime. That's a terrible, terrible waste of time and talent.

The example is an extreme one, but on the smallest, smallest chance that such a result can come of any workshop, I feel that now, speaking from my position as director of Alma College's MFA in Creative Writing program, I must do something, however small, to alleviate the issue of workshop anxiety. Most writing workshops, at least in my experience, are not vicious or competitive, but they are rigorous—and helpful. But a writer must be prepared for the rigor, as one would for any vigorous activity. I want all writers to have productive experiences in the classroom. I want writers to keep writing after they graduate from our program. By the way, I say this for everyone reading this, students and teachers alike: I will not accost anyone on the playground after any future workshop sessions. You are safe.

What is Workshop?

The discussion of whether or not creative writing can be taught, and whether workshops are helpful or harmful to the creative process, has been an active one for years. Does the pedagogy of workshop work? Is it the most effective way to teach creative writing? On the one side we have writers such as Anis Shivani, author of Against the Workshop: Provocations, Polemics, Controversies (2011). In a 2011 essay for a Symposium on "Can 'Creative Writing' Really Be Taught," in the literary journal Boulevard he wrote,

The psychology of the workshop has not yet been thoroughly explored. It is a mild form of hazing, an officially sanctioned sadism in which students eagerly participate. The student sits quietly while his work is read in front of him, not allowed to intervene as peers shred his work or occasionally praise it. All kinds of political, gender, class, and racial subtexts pervade such peer-to-peer "critique." Those criticizing are as ignorant of the art of

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writing as those whose work is being discussed. They're picking up cues from the instructor as to what is acceptable or not acceptable. (Wilson et al. 2011)

John Gardner is representative of those who see the favorable view of workshop. In On Becoming a Novelist, he wrote,

It is true that most writers' workshops have faults; nevertheless, a relatively good writers' workshop can be beneficial… Being with a group of serious writers at one's own stage of development makes the young writer feel less a freak than he might otherwise, and talking with other writers, looking at their work, listening to their comments, can abbreviate the apprenticeship process. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that, after the beginning stages, a writer needs social and psychological support. (1999, 73-4)

I doubt this debate will ever go away, but one feature will never change—there will always be a writer seeking to learn. And this writer will often find herself in a group, whether inside or outside of academia, as she searches to improve her craft. However, very little of what I read for this essay—actually John Gardner was a bit of an exception—spoke about workshop from the point of view of the writer in terms of thinking about the experience the writer wants for herself out of workshop. What does that person hope to learn? How does she listen, how does she think about a critique? It seems students are just supposed to show up and wait to be acted upon by whatever theory the teacher in charge presents. Maybe these essays don't address this because they know, on a certain level, it can paint the "Workshop: good or bad?" issue with a tinge of irrelevancy. A proactive writer, at least one beyond the undergraduate level, will take what she can from a workshop, good or bad, and move on. Which means the debaters can go on debating and they will go on for years to come. What I'm saying is, workshop is not going to change, but you can. You are here now, and you can better understand what's going on with your writing and what you might need to improve it, and what kind of workshop experience you hope to have.

But you must take ownership of both your writing and your learning process and be confident enough to assess and assert yourself consistently. The poet William Stafford wrote,

Becoming a writer is just partly the learning of tricks and processes of language. Literature comes about by way of a behavior, a way of thinking, a tendency of mind and feeling. We can all learn technique and then improvise pieces of writing again and again, but without a certain security of character we cannot sustain the vision, the trajectory of significant creation: we can learn and know and still not understand. Perceiving the need for that security of character is not enough—you have to possess it, and it is a gift, or something like a gift. (1986, ix; italics added)

What does Stafford mean by "security of character?" I take this to mean a certain understanding of one's work and a willingness to put aside or temporarily suppress our other personality foibles for the sake of the work. This doesn't mean confidence although confidence in the right doses always helps. And this goes beyond trying not to take a critique too personally. We sometimes say, "Oh, she's taking this personally," but I think that's an oversimplification of the matter because there can be many things brewing in any particular emotional mix: doubt about one's talent, being overwhelmed at the prospect of what to do with all the workshop commentary, or plain, run-of-the-mill fear. What you're reading here now won't cure all this, but I'm hoping you will be able to put this stew on the back burner at least for a little while, for the benefit of the writing at hand.

The Approach

Let's begin by dispensing with the image of the workshop as a torture chamber or a hazing situation. I prefer the poet Donald Hall's metaphor that compares workshop to a garage. In the book Breakfast Served Any Time All Day: Essays on Poetry New and Selected, he writes,

The poetry workshop resembles a garage to which we bring incomplete or malfunctioning homemade machines for diagnosis and repair. Here is the homemade airplane for which the crazed inventor forgot to provide wings; here is the internal combustion engine all finished except that it lacks a carburetor; here is the rowboat without oarlocks, the ladder without rungs, the motorcycle without wheels. We advance our nonfunctional machine into a circle of other apprentice inventors and one or two senior Edisons. "Very good," they say; "it almost flies… How about, uh… how about wings?" Or "Let me show you how to build a carburetor." (Hall 2003, 163)

This metaphor appealed to me because this is how I've spoken about my first published novel. I say the book felt like an airplane I built by myself in my garage. Yes, it worked, it flew, but I knew that for my writing to get any better I needed to bring more writers into the garage, perhaps some who knew about jet engines, or some who could show me how to build a time machine because I wanted to work on historical fiction. I also like this metaphor because it's not intimidating, and it smacks of potential. This garage, your workshop, is filled with a tremendous opportunity for you to see your writing in ways that would be difficult for you to do on your own.
John Gardner wrote,

Often class criticism can show the writer that he has at some specific point written misleadingly or has failed to evoke some important element of a scene—mistakes the writer could not catch himself because, knowing what he intended, he thinks his sentences say more than they do. He may imagine, for instance, that the bulge in his female character's coat clearly indicates that she is carrying a gun, whereas a listener not privy to the writer's mental image may imagine that the woman is pregnant. Seeing the effects of his mistakes makes the writer more careful, more wary of the trickery words are capable of…. The wide range of opinion a class affords increases the writer's chance of getting a fair hearing… and the focus of the whole class on the writer's work increases the odds that most of his mistakes or ineffective strategies will be noticed (1999, 82-83).

When you bring a piece, an invention, into the garage you do so because you've taken it as far as you can on your own. You've bumped up against your own limitations or you've run out of ideas. In workshop there's a chance you'll get to overcome these difficulties and already that will allow you to walk into the garage with a kind of hopeful expectation. That's cause for excitement, even nervousness, but it doesn't have to be fear. But for you to feel this hopefulness, and to get the most benefit out of the workshop experience, you have to be proactive about the way you think about your writing. I believe some of the fear around workshop comes from feeling one is passive and has no power in the workshop; you are being acted upon. But if you prepare your work and prepare your mind, you'll find yourself having a more productive and perhaps even enjoyable experience. Your hope can be realized.

Before Workshop

At the Alma College MFA and similar programs, a few weeks before residency the students receive an email letting them know it's time to submit writing for workshop. You can submit any manner of work, but how do you choose? You don't want to submit something that's completely done, meaning you've gone through a number of revisions and the piece is ready to be sent out and possibly published. You definitely don't want to submit something that's already been accepted for publication, as tempting as that may be. A teacher once told me that when a student does that, she is acting out of fear, huge fear, and she wants to have that shield of being able to reply to any negative critique by saying, "Well, this is already going to be published." Which doesn't help the student as a writer and is disrespectful to fellow students who put in the time and effort of reading and providing feedback.

On the other hand, you don't want to submit a rough, rough first draft. That can also be a waste of valuable critiquing time because a lot of the discussion might be spent on issues you probably would have figured out yourself in the course of one or two revisions. Ideally you want to submit a piece that you've done some work on: it is very much "in progress" but you've taken it as far as you can for the moment. You have questions about the piece, and you want to come to workshop with these questions in mind to help you focus on what you're seeking. If you haven't thought about this and if you haven't been workshopped yet, I encourage you to go back and reread your piece to generate your questions. You might ask yourself:

- What am I trying to do with this piece? This question will keep you focused on your result, the result you want. Otherwise, you could get sidetracked by feed back that will lead you to imitate something that isn't you.

- Where did I struggle? If you're already unhappy about the piece, articulate as much as possible why and then be glad because you're going to get help finding out how to work with this issue. Notice I didn't say, "fix it." It's not always possible in workshop to come up with a fix—some would say that's not even a goal—but you could come away with some ideas about how to approach the issue, some new things to try.

- What are my favorite parts? (And note, they can still be your favorite parts, no matter what is said about them. Don't take the opportunity to beat yourself up!)

- Is there a specific craft technique I'm using or would like to use but don't know how? By the way, there's another benefit to asking these kinds of questions before you submit your writing—it can help you cut if you need to trim down to the required number of pages. I realized this when I wanted to submit a long essay for a workshop and I was cutting wherever I could to get down to the necessary twenty pages. But as I looked at the structure of the essay again, I realized the sections were set up in such a way that I could remove parts without harming the gist of the story. Some of these sections I liked a lot, others I wasn't sure of. It occurred to me that instead of cutting all the sections piecemeal, I could just delete some of the sections I liked and keep the parts where I wanted feedback. You can't always do this, some pieces just won't break down this way without harming the whole, but it's something to think about to give you another option.

In order to ask these questions, you want to know your strengths and weaknesses as a writer. If you do, then some of the criticisms you receive will not be new to you—another reason not to take it personally. If you're being honest with yourself, you know how confusing and unclear your metaphors can be, you know how stingy you were with that character's development, or how you have a tendency to evoke settings that are about as engaging as gray cardboard. Remember you've come to the garage for some thoughts on how to work with these issues. At some point you have to stand up for your own writing and understand your own voice. The writer Frank Wilson said, "Someone else can teach you how to write like somebody else. But nobody can teach you how to write like yourself" (2011, 98).

For illustrative purposes I'll share some of my issues with you. By the way, Donald Hall said in his essay, "Lectures loud with moral advice are always self-addressed" (2003, 168). The words I say to you here are also reminders to myself, things I tell myself over and over because I often forget and must relearn them:

- My characters can all sound the same. In the beginning, they are all some incarnation of me, but then they grow up and grow into their own voices. If I haven't spent enough time on a character, or if

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I'm not careful, that process hasn't happened. Or I will slip into my own voice while writing the character. The word "mannered" once came up in workshop pertaining to how a character sounded and I immediately knew what that meant because that's how I can sound. It would be easy to take that personally, but the writer offering the critique didn't know me well enough to know it's my voice he's calling "mannered," yet he was astute in noticing this was an issue. It's up to me to understand what it's about and not be upset. I have a friend I value as a reader of my work specifically because he knows well what I sound like both as a speaker and as a writer. He will lovingly and accurately point to a section and say, "There's Sophfronia!"

- In my rendering of dramatic scenes, I hit the "Turbo Melodrama" button from time to time. I can't help it. I watched too many soap operas in my formative years.
- My essays can seem as though I'm writing in a kind of shorthand, and by that I mean I'm writing as though the reader already knows who I am and what's going on. This comes from writing letters, which I do abundantly. I'm usually writing to some one who knows me well and that ten dency spills over into my creative nonfiction. I must remind myself to fully tell a story or provide back ground when necessary.
- Sometimes my word choices aren't precise enough. It's not that I don't care, but I'm so concerned with moving the plot along from point A to point B to point C, making sure it holds up and it works that I ignore the finer points. I usually get back to this in revision, but in a longer work I may miss many opportunities to make a better choice. It really helps me to have someone else read and challenge me there.

During Workshop

Now we're in workshop and the class is discussing your piece. Knowing your strengths and weaknesses will provide you with a kind of buffer—you shouldn't be surprised if the issues you know well turn up in workshop. But let me caution you here: you don't want to be in a mindset where you hear some of what you expected to hear and then stop listening because you've developed an attitude of "I already knew that." When you do that, you close yourself off to the learning. You'll miss the opportunity to recognize and focus on a critique that could open your eyes to something new in your writing, good or bad. If you are clear and paying attention you can ask yourself:

- Is this new critique true?
- What can I do with this information? What avenues has it opened for me to explore?
- Will it help me do what I'm seeking to do with the piece? How?

You want to be constantly filtering the comments. If you have a general sense of what you're looking to learn, and if you're open-minded, it will be easier for you to tell what critique is helpful, and what isn't. This is a free-flow exchange of ideas, and your work is at the center of it. Really listen. Either ask someone to take notes for you, or only take notes when you hear something you know you want to do.

A side note: If you hear a comment that your plot or situation or scene isn't believable and you want to respond with "But it really happened," don't. Such a response will not be helpful to you. Charles Baxter writes,

And the writer of this piece, wounded all over again by life, eventually says, "But it really happened!" or "It's all true!"

Such a statement is unarguable but false to an experience of reading that concentrates on characters. It's like telling a bride on her wedding night that her spouse's body really consists of carbon molecules and hydrogen atoms and smaller subatomic particles such as quarks. It's true, but priggish, and beside the point. (2008, 21-40)

The workshop readers can only address what is on the page and if they are having trouble believing it, then you have not communicated what really happened in a way that makes the story believable for them. That is the issue. Recognize it, and then ask questions that will help you understand what aspects of the work make it unbelievable. You are seeking ideas so you can revise accordingly.

After Workshop

Be grateful for all the feedback but know you don't have to use every piece of it. I know the sheer volume of comments you received might bewildered you. It's hard to know where to begin, and you might think you have to use it all simply because someone took the time to give it to you. You don't have to use it all and if you think upfront about what will be helpful in terms of what you're trying to write, you will know how to choose and not make yourself crazy.

It might help to write a note to yourself with a brief narrative of what you heard and what you learned about the piece. You might even make a list of specific points you want to address, divided into what you can try right away and what you might want to consider after more thought. I encourage you to do this as soon as you can after workshop, either right after or that evening. You must leave breadcrumbs for yourself because you might feel like you want to dump all the notes and comments on your desk when you get back to your room and not think about the piece or workshop again until after residency. But by then you'll either not want to look through the notes again because you fear being overwhelmed, or you'll forget what was helpful, what your notes meant, or what you wanted to do. You don't want to waste what you learned, so write it down as soon as you can.

Also, you can write or rewrite according to the suggestions you receive, but you don't have to be wedded to the outcome of that revision. In my workshop this past residency we spoke at length about whether I had revealed too much about a character in my novel too soon, and whether a particular part I described was truly indicative of his wealth, power, and place in society. So I left that workshop with a mound of notes and wrote a whole new chapter based on this new vision of my character. It was not easy because I had to do some historical research involving Ebbets Field, the Brooklyn Dodgers, and Jackie Robinson's crossing the color line in major league baseball in 1947. The finished chapter had its pluses and minuses. It had some cool details and story, but the historical facts and the overall situation I created for my character didn't work with the rest of the book. This new material turned the character into someone else and on top of that, suddenly I was writing a baseball novel, which was not what I intended to write. So, despite spending a few weeks on this chapter, I got rid of it. But that's okay. I wouldn't have learned if I hadn't made the attempt.

You also have the option of doing nothing at all. If you're diligent in this process of knowing your work and preparing yourself before, during, and after workshop you'll find a kind of alchemy happening where the way you use workshop may change and your need for it may even lessen. When I was in Puerto Rico for one of VCFA's study abroad residencies, we were discussing whether it helps to have a writing group after graduation. Some writers seem to require them, and others don't. But if you don't think about your work in a proactive way, you put yourself in this situation where you're always waiting for approval or consensus before you make a change to your work. The poet Mary Ruefle, one of our faculty advisors on the trip, put it best when she said, "The more you write, the more you will know to cross out that wrong line when you read it, and you won't wait until your writing group meets at 7:30 on a Tuesday night for someone to tell you to do it" (2014).

Conclusion

I have another confession to make: my motive in writing this essay is a little selfish. When I met Douglas Glover (another member of the VCFA faculty) during my first semester, he told me he wants his students to be serious about their writing. I want the same, but I ask it not as a teacher, or an MFA program director, but as a reader. If you don't continue to write and learn and be productive in your work, I don't get the chance to be changed by something you've written. Every single writer has a unique voice and a very specific gift to give. When you don't share what you have to offer to the world, we are all lesser for it. I also say this because in my experience it helps my writing to know it's not all about me. Likewise, it's not all about you. This takes some of the pressure off. You can get out of your head and get work done. And you must get work done because if you don't put it out there, we can't receive it. I'll end here with a Bruce Springsteen lyric from "Into the Fire" because I think it's a wonderful expression of the potential you have:

May your strength give us strength
May your faith give us faith
May your hope give us hope
May your love bring us love. (2002)

I want you to enjoy your workshops. I hope they're productive, I hope you'll be fearless. I know you can do it.

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Creating Images of What is Happening in Your World to Change the World: The Power of Images in the Classroom of the World

Ralph Basui Watkins
Columbia Theological Seminary

Joshua Rashaad McFadden
Rochester Institute of Technology

Visual culture is not merely an important feature of contemporary life; it is the most important culture we must navigate.
Alexis L. Boylan, Visual Culture

How do we see and help our students to see? Our students have the most powerful tool in their hands: the cell phone / camera phone. The phone many students hold in their hand is more powerful than the camera I used to complete my thesis work for my MFA in photography. As teachers, how do we use the camera as a teaching tool? How do we encourage our students to go into the world, see what is happening, capture it in images, and then share those images with their classmates? As we live in the visual age, we have to consider making the visual a central part of our teaching. Bringing the visual into the classroom through the eyes of our students will help us see and help them see. The call is to use images as a core partner along with the readings and other artifacts we assign. When we use images as a core part of our teaching it will expand our students' vision of the world in which they live; it will cause them to pause and see.

In this visual age, where we take more pictures in one hour than we did in the last one hundred years combined, we have to use images in our classroom. We have to use images as a central core of our teaching. Moreover, when we make images, take pictures in the moment, and share our work with our students, something transformative happens. We are made to stop and see the world. When we assign our students to go outside the classroom and make pictures about that which we are studying it adds another layer to the classroom experience. We can teach about social justice but what if we assigned our student to go and capture pictures of social justice in action? How would this expand the learning experimental platform? We want our students to see what is going in our backyard when it comes to social justice and local movements. As professors we need to lift our phones, engage the visual, and use and make images in the moment that move the world.

In 2020 we saw the world be challenged by what it saw. The world was made to look. As professors we need to be prepared to see and show that which can change the world. Images say something, do something, and frame how we see the world. As professors we can't remain neutral and not enter the frame. We must take pictures, post them, and change the world. Images have a place in the classroom. A central place. "Visual culture is never neutral, and is thus never without value. Visual culture is power. As historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot might say, none of us can afford to be naive and just hope for the best where visual culture is concerned. The visual always means something" (Boylan 2020, xxiii-xxiv). We can construct a pedagogy of hope with the use of images that call for and facilitate social justice.

Leigh Raiford, in her book Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare: Photography and the African American Freedom Struggle (2013), makes the convincing argument that it was photography that ensured that the Civil Rights Movement saw the light of day. It was photography that shed light on injustice and made America look at injustice. America saw itself like never before. It had to look at what was happening to African Americans. From the images of Emmitt Till taken by photographer David Jackson in 1955, to the images of water hoses and dogs being let loose on teenagers in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963 taken by Charles Moore: photographs made America look. The images moved our nation to act because of what they saw. What they saw was buttressed by the call from the streets, the protest, the cries, and a movement that outlined the demands for justice. America became a different place, voting rights and civil rights were secured because of the movement. It all started with the image. The images of Emmitt Till birthed the Civil Rights Movement and it was the video taken by seventeen-year-old Darnella Frazier of George Floyd, laying on the ground in handcuffs, with officer David Chauvin's knee on his neck that birthed the movement in the summer of 2020.

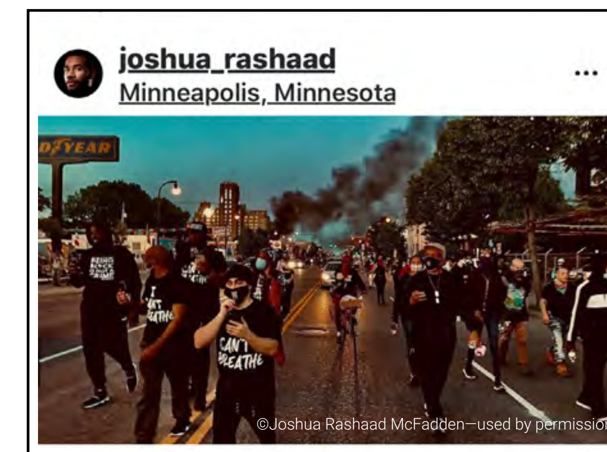
Darnella Frazier took the cell phone she had in her hand and captured the harrowing video that got the world's attention. For eight minutes and forty-six seconds George Floyd was pinned to the ground. George Floyd was murdered in the streets of Minneapolis by David Chauvin while Chauvin's fellow officers stood by as accomplices to the murder. There was no impunity on the other officers' faces. They protected their partner as he smothered the life out of George Floyd. Floyd cried, "I can't breathe." Floyd called for his mother and Darnella Frazier, embodying the spirit of Fannie Lou Hamer, called injustice out by the use of her camera phone. The use of the moving image captured by a teenager who had the wherewithal to shed light on injustice birthed the movement. The amateur work of Darnella Frazier also captured the heart of photographer Joshua Rashaad McFadden who was in Rochester, New York; after seeing the video shot by Darnella Frazier, he got in his car and drove to Minneapolis.

When I interviewed Joshua Rashaad McFadden for this article, he said, "Something moved me, the spirit moved me. I had to go. When I saw that video, I had to go. I got my camera, got in my car, and just went. I didn't sleep for four days. When I got there, I just started taking pictures." The pictures that Joshua took with his cell phone were posted on Instagram. The likes, comments, and shares poured in and within two days the New York Times reached out to Joshua and his images ended up on their front page. Once again America and the world had to look at injustice, and they acted. The still image is something you can't turn away from. You are forced to pause and look. You sit with it; it speaks to you. It touches you and demands a reaction. Joshua's images demanded a reaction and people acted. They double-tapped the photos on Instagram as they marched in the streets.

What can we learn from the work of Joshua and so many other photographers? How can we use what we have in our hand to become visual activist like Darnella Frazier? How do we shoot, compose, and post images that get people's attention? How do we take our family, friends, and colleagues out to protest with us, to see what we see, when they are unable or unwilling to go? How do we create a body of visual evidence so powerful that it calls the world to act on behalf of justice? We will engage these questions and look at the work of Joshua Rashaad McFadden over the next few pages to empower you to be a visual activist. This work provides a frame in which you can think about why images work, how to compose them, and how to make your students visually literate. The ten images were posted on social media by Joshua. These images were taken in real time and the world stopped and looked. I engaged this work as it was posted and talked to Joshua about it that summer. He shares his thoughts and, in this dialogue, engaging his work, think about the work you and your students can do in your local community; bring that work back to the classroom, discuss it, and put in conversation with the text, lecture, and other artifacts of class.

1. When you see it, run and get it.

This was the first image Joshua posted. When I saw it, I thought he shot it with a high-end camera using a wide angle lens. When I asked him about it, he said, "I saw the crowd forming. I didn't have my big camera; all I had was my phone. I saw the shoot, I ran way down the road to get in front of them, and I got the shoot



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with my phone." The first thing you have to do is see. See what you want to capture and get in position to capture it. The first rule of photography is where do I stand? Where do you stand to get the composition that you want? You want the camera to see what you see but you have to position yourself in such a way to get it. Joshua ran and got ahead of the crowd so that we could see what he saw. This image puts us in front of the march: you are there, you can feel the energy, see the depth of the city, and the energy of the marchers. Every good image reads well left to right and front to back. From left to right, you see the people—you are one with them. From front to back, you see the massiveness of the protest and the city on fire as representative of their rage and cry for justice. You are in the streets and you are marching with them in this image. It calls us to be there. We are there in this picture.

2. Feel the fire.

What do you feel? What you feel should inspire the pictures you take. Photography is about feeling, it is intuitive. If what you see moves you, show it to us. In this image Joshua felt the fire. He

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felt the city burning. How did he show us? He took this picture with a young man walking in front of the fire raising his fist. This image humanizes the struggle. It isn't an image about a burning building but rather it is an image about the voice of the voiceless. It has intensity, rich color, depth, vibrancy, and urgency. You are walking down the street with this young man. You are in step with him, and you are at the struggle. You have been teleported by this image from Joshua's Instagram feed to feeling the fire, pain, and energy of the protest.

3. There is power in a portrait.

While it is important to bring us to the struggle with images of the marches and crowds at protests, what we know is that the protesters are real people. They have jobs, families, and they have feelings. Photography makes us feel. It touches our core emotions. Joshua captures what we call "a found portrait" with

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this image. A found portrait is not something someone posed for, but rather the photographer found it as they looked into the crowd and saw that face. The face that expressed the emotion of the moment. The beauty of the pain and the power of the moment is captured in the portrait. In this image we see the eyes of our brother. We see the tears in his eyes, the beauty of his hair, the mask of the pandemic, and the story on his arm. The composition of this image tells a story. The story of the brother who is out at night walking the streets calling for justice and calling us to walk with him. The blackness of his clothing, his mask, his colorful tattoos, the water bottle in his backpack, reflecting the yellow light of hope, all juxtaposed by the light of hope above the fray of his mask. We see his eyes and the radiant light of angelic hope that shines around him, and we feel him. As you go, don't forget to capture portraits.

4. Be there in the morning and the evening.

The best light for images is in the morning when the sun is just rising or in the early evening when the sun is beginning to set. Photography literally means writing with light; in this image we

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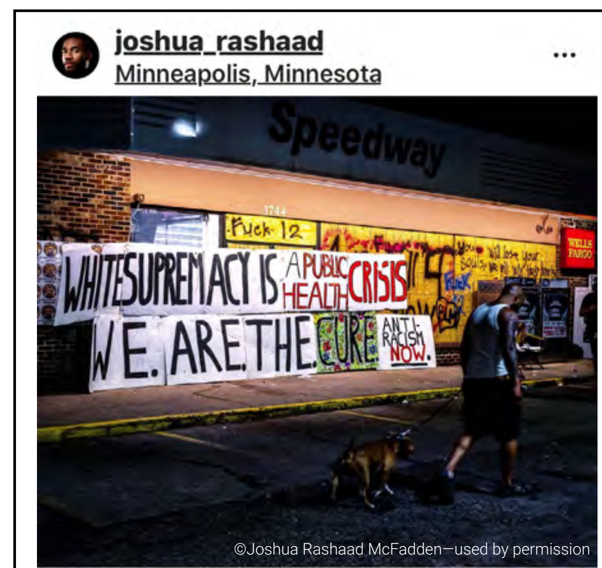
see the beauty of how light writes the story. The image is captured beautifully as Joshua positions himself behind the subject and gets the light reflecting off of the car, the taillights of the car, and the yellow haze of smoke in the distance. This picture is taken from a low angle, and it allows the viewer to look up. As they look up, they see what the protestors are seeing. They are now the third person in the frame because of how Joshua has positioned himself behind the car. The sun provides a silhouette as the smoke blends in with the warmth of the scene. The protestors' frustration is symbolized by their emboldened hand gestures. If Joshua hadn't been there in the morning, the beautiful play of the yellows, reds, blues, and whites of this image wouldn't have been captured. You have to be there when the light is good. Always look for the light.

5. Get close enough to tell the story.



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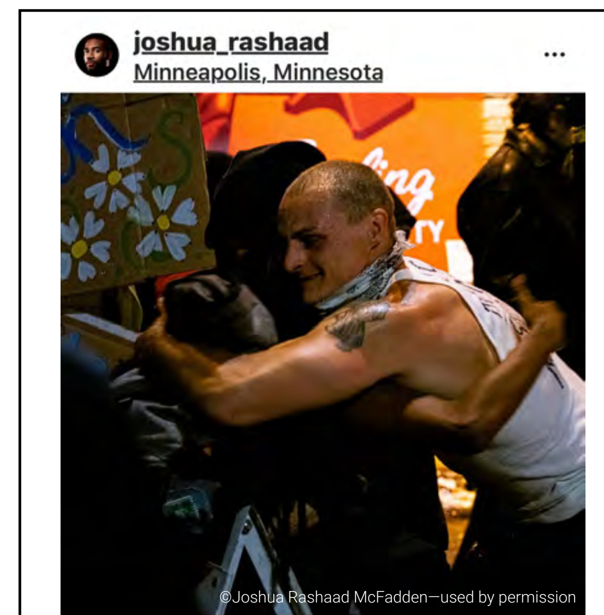
There is a quote that is attributed to the great photographer Robert Capa: "If your images aren't good enough you aren't close enough." Closeness to your subject adds depth, connection, and life to the frame. In this image Joshua is close. You can actually smell the sweat and touch the man as he walks with his dog. You can reach out and pat the dog as you feel the struggle. The image reads well left to right as the man and the dog walk through the frame. They lead you to the writing on the wall and you read, you walk, you feel, and you are immersed. You are immersed in the image because you are close; Joshua is right there, and you are right there. Get close, zoom with your feet. Resist using the zoom function on your phone and walk up to the subject instead, get close, bring the viewer into the picture for a more intimate experience.

6. Show the love.

In all movements there are those tender moments of love and compassion. We miss this if we don't look for it. Images like this one show the love and support protestors give each other. It shows the toll this justice work takes on those who put their



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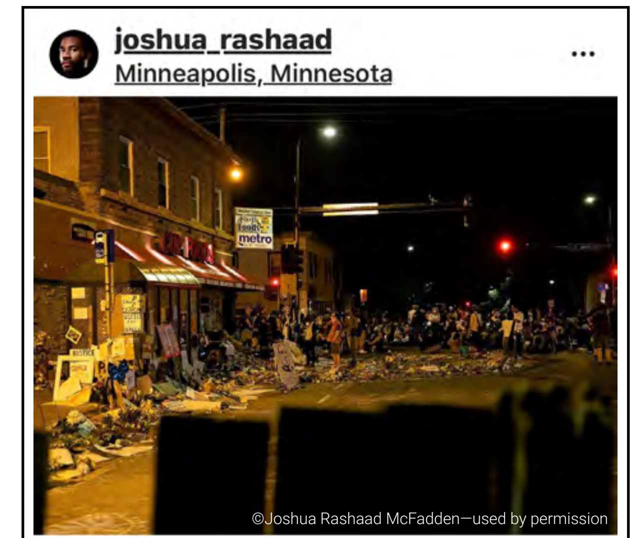
bodies on the line to do the work. Look for those tender moments. Look for those moments of reconciliation and support across culturally defined boundaries. Look for those moments where diversity is present and show the story that brings depth and humanity to the struggle.

7. Allow the viewer to peek in on the emotion of the movement.

The beauty of this shoot is that it is as though we are peeking in over the barricade. We are there looking down the road at the growing memorial. The memorial to George Floyd grew over time as the world watched. It happened on that very cor-



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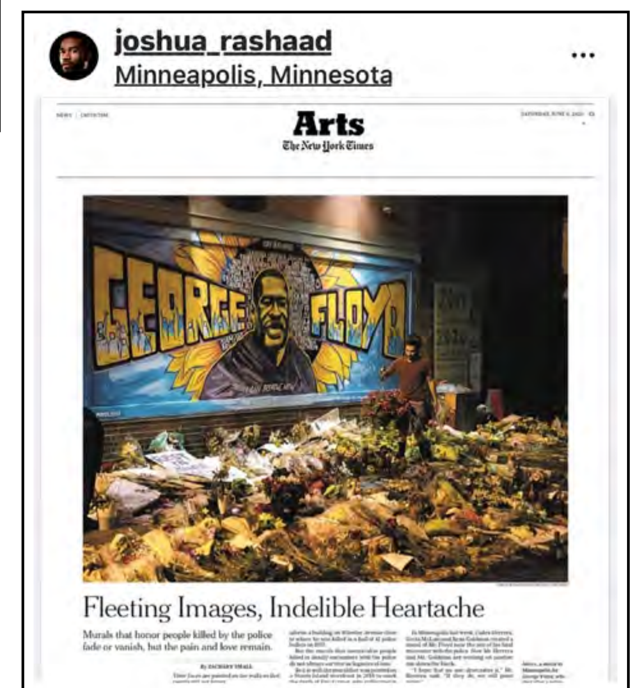
ner where Darnella Frazier captured the video. We are back there again and this time it is night, the protesters are mourning, and we are invited to mourn with them. We are not quite in the mix, but we are in the moment. Look for angles, position yourself back from the crowd, pull out and offer a different perspective. There is power in the image that offers the viewer the vantage point of feeling from afar. Both the closeup and the wide shoot from an interesting perspective add value to the experience for those following you, as you post the story you are living through in the midst of the struggle.

8. Isolate the subject so we can see one person at a time.

While the previous image gave us a wide shoot of the growing memorial this shoot makes it personal. By finding that lone person in the frame we can see ourselves in this moment. We become one with the mourner as we can sense the hundreds who



Arts
The New York Times

Fleeting Images, Indelible Heartache

Murals that honor people killed by the police fade or vanish, but the pain and love remain.

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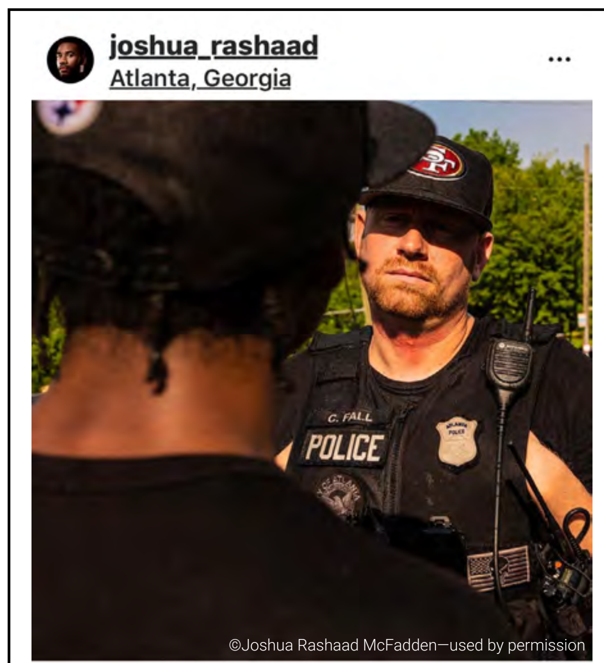
have made this journey to leave flowers and tears of sorrow, cry for justice, and encounter the art that moves. Murals and public art proliferated in the city. Joshua journeyed to those spots to capture images like this. A part of the protest is the art of the protest, the memorials, and the mourners who gather there. They gather together and they come alone. The single person in this frame makes it very personal. It is personal, and shoots like this make it personal. Look for those persons in the crowd who have gotten away from the crowd and who call us one by one to be a part of the movement. Also look for the art that speaks in the image to help us see and feel what this is all about.

9. Interactions—capture intense interactions.

Protests are about relationships, encounters, and intense interactions. The force of the police force is present and this interaction as well as others are a part of this evolving drama. Joshua gets behind the protestor, peeks over his shoulder to capture the face of the police officer. We see the officer's face, his ex-



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pression, his name, and his hat; not a police officer's hat, but a San Francisco Forty-niners hat—the team that Colin Kaepernick played for while in the National Football League. We don't see the face of the protestor; it is as if our faces become that of the protestor. We are encountering the officer. It is our expression, our response that makes this image work. We are engaging the officer with the protestor. Once again Joshua is close; he has captured that moment of interaction that defines the situation and we are there. We feel this encounter as we become one with it. The officer's face is covered by the shadow from the bill of his hat as he looks intently at us. We see his nose, mouth, facial hair, his hands tucked in his jacket, and the black American flag on his vest. We are in this emotional interaction, and you want to find these interactions and capture them as you engage them emotionally.

10. Get behind the action to bring your viewers front and center.

Thousands in front of the stage are taking pictures but the interesting shoot is from a different vantage point. Joshua comes behind the stage and gets the shoot over the shoulder of the speakers to show the energy of the crowd. This is an interesting perspective and to find it you have to look where the other photographers are not. Where are people not holding up their phones and taking pictures? When you ask this question and see that location, get there and take your picture. Get that interesting perspective that brings the viewer into the protest from a different perspective. Perspectives like this are perspectives we can't turn away from. They make us look deeper, longer, and more intently. The composition itself alters our way of seeing so we look harder to make sense of what we are seeing. While the shoot is interesting, inviting, and intriguing, it is different. Look for these spots that turn things around for the viewer and this will allow them to feel what you are seeing as they see themselves in this moment.

These are ten tips and examples of images that work. The key here is to take pictures. Get in the practice of picking up your phone and using that camera. The camera is a powerful teaching and learning tool. Let these ten examples guide you but not constrain you. Use your camera and make your images a part of your work. We are living in the visual age and those who do not learn how to communicate visually will be operating at a deficit. As professors, we have to bring images into the classroom and teach our students how to create images that communicate.

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Students must become visually literate. When we assign the visual as a part of core course assignments, we will see how our students will gravitate to this experience and show us things we never could've imagined.

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Joshua Rashaad McFadden is an American visual artist whose primary medium is photography. McFadden explores the use of archival material within his work and is known for his portraiture. He also conceptually investigates themes related to identity, masculinity, history, race, and sexuality.

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